

16 railroad deaths in 2009 renews the call for commitment to safety

CLEVELAND, January 29 — The Federal Railroad Administration is calling on all railroad workers to give heightened attention to safety in 2010 following 16 on-the-job fatalities in 2009.

According to a January 26 letter from FRA Administrator Joseph C. Szabo, the 16 railroad worker deaths represent a “tragic toll” and he urges all current workers to “think about rules compliance and consider its impact on ensuring a safe return home after each tour of duty.”

Among those killed in 2009 were two BLET members — Andrew R. Reed and Josh Osborn, both just 27 years old. They were working in the cab together for the Iowa, Chicago & Eastern Railroad (IC&E) when their train hit a misaligned switch near Bettendorf, Ill., on July 14, 2009. They were members of BLET Division 266 in Savanna, Ill.

“This tragic toll is more than just a number,” Szabo wrote. “It represents human lives; a father not there to walk his daughter down the aisle, a mother not there for her son’s first day of school, an employee nearing retirement who did not live to enjoy the fruits of his labor.”

In the letter, Szabo encouraged all rail workers to avoid distractions and maintain complete situational awareness while on duty.

“We must break down the barriers that keep us from achieving rules compliance, like taking a shortcut or yielding to pressure from a supervisor to unsafely expedite a move,” he wrote. “We must take the time to ensure each rule is complied with, and mentor fellow coworkers.”

If managers pressure workers to rush through jobs and skip rule compliance, then they should be immediately reported to the FRA, Szabo said.

“If you are pressured by a supervisor to expedite a move by turning your back on the rules, report it,” he said. “FRA will work diligently to ensure that the focus on rules compliance is consistent with each carrier’s organization.”

BLET National President Paul T. Sorrow extended deepest sympathies on behalf of the BLET to the families of all railroaders killed on the job last year, especially the families of Josh Osborn and Andrew Reed.

He also thanked Administrator Szabo for his commitment to safety, and urged all BLET members to heed this latest safety message.

“Joe Szabo is a former railroader and union member, so he knows what railroaders go through on the front lines and in the trenches,” Sorrow said. “I encourage all BLET members to keep safety in the forefront of their minds each and every day, and to call out managers who seek to put profits ahead of safety.”