



The Trade & Transit Times

Your Guide to Skilled Trade and Transportation Union News



- Precision Scheduled Railroading: A Threat to Our Safety, Jobs, and Service Quality
- Whistleblower Protection: A Pillar of Workplace Safety and Accountability
- AFL-CIO's 2024 "Death on the Job" Report

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Precision Scheduled Railroading: A Threat to Our Safety, Jobs, and Service Quality

Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) threatens worker safety, union jobs, and service quality in the rail industry. While it promises greater efficiency and profitability for rail companies, the reality is a significant increase in risks, including workforce reductions that compromise job security and safety. Additionally, the operational changes under PSR disrupt service quality, affecting both workers and customers. These impacts highlight the urgent need to address and oppose the detrimental effects of PSR on our industry.

What is Precision Scheduled Railroading?

Precision Scheduled Railroading is a method used by rail companies to run fewer, longer trains on stricter schedules. It's designed to cut costs and improve efficiency. However, this strategy has led to serious negative consequences for workers and the rail industry as a whole.

Workforce Reductions and Job Security

One of the most immediate impacts of PSR has been significant workforce reductions. Rail companies have aggressively cut jobs to lower costs, resulting in layoffs and the consolidation of operations. According to reports, Class 1 railroads have reduced their transportation and maintenance staff by over 20% between 2011 and 2021. These cuts not only jeopardize job security for thousands of workers but also leave rail networks vulnerable during disruptions, as there are fewer personnel available to manage emergencies and maintain operations.

Safety Risks

The emphasis on running longer, heavier trains under PSR introduces severe safety risks. Longer trains are inherently more challenging to operate and manage, increasing the likelihood of accidents and derailments. The reduction in maintenance and inspection staff exacerbates these risks, as there are fewer resources available to ensure the safe operation of rail equipment and infrastructure. For example, the CSX derailment in Hyndman, Pennsylvania in 2017, where the distribution of weight in a longer train contributed to the accident, highlights the dangers posed by PSR.

Disruption of Service Quality

PSR has also led to significant disruptions in service quality for customers. Railroads like Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific have closed numerous low-volume lanes, causing major service issues for shippers. These disruptions result in delayed deliveries, increased transportation costs, and logistical challenges, ultimately affecting the broader supply chain and economy. Such instability is unacceptable, particularly in an industry that serves as a critical backbone of commerce.

Call to Action

As union members, it is important for us to stand united against the negative impacts of Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR). We should advocate for a balanced approach to railroad operations that emphasizes safety, job security, and reliable service. Your participation is vital in urging the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to oppose PSR and prioritize the well-being of railroad workers and the communities we serve. By uniting our efforts, we can ensure that our railroads remain safe, our jobs secure, and our services reliable. Let's take action today to protect the future of our industry.

Please visit the **ASTTU Action Center**:

www.asttu.org/action-center and sign our petition.

Sources:

1. https://www.railjournal.com/in_depth/precision-scheduled-railroading-evolution-or-revolution/
2. <https://sites.law.duq.edu/juris/2020/03/10/the-perils-of-precision-scheduled-railroading-are-railroads-running-out-of-control/>
3. <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/what-is-precision-scheduled-railroading>
4. <https://www.breakthroughfuel.com/blog/what-is-precision-scheduled-railroading/>



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Whistleblower Protection: A Pillar of Workplace Safety and Accountability

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) enforces Whistleblower Protections under Section 11(c) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) and under 24 other statutes. This article explores the current state of whistleblower protection, emphasizing its importance and the mechanisms in place to safeguard employees who report violations.

The Importance of Whistleblower Protection

Whistleblowers play a critical role in identifying and reporting unsafe working conditions, unethical practices, and violations of laws that could endanger workers' health and safety. Without adequate protection, employees might be reluctant to report such issues due to fear of retaliation. Effective whistleblower protection ensures that employees can speak out without facing adverse consequences, thereby promoting a safer and more accountable workplace environment.

OSHA's Role in Enforcing Whistleblower Protections

OSHA's Whistleblower Protection Program is instrumental in enforcing the provisions of over 20 federal laws that protect employees from retaliation. These laws cover various sectors, including workplace safety and health, aviation safety, commercial motor carrier safety, consumer product safety, environmental protection, financial reform, and food safety.

Section 11(c) of the OSH Act specifically prohibits employers from retaliating against employees who report violations or engage in other protected activities. Retaliation can include actions such as firing, demoting, denying benefits, or any other action that would discourage a reasonable employee from reporting a violation.

Filing a Whistleblower Complaint

Employees who believe they have been retaliated against can file a complaint with OSHA. The complaint must be filed within 30 days of the retaliatory action. OSHA then conducts an investigation, which can include on-site inspections and reviews of the employer's practices. If OSHA finds merit in the complaint, it can order remedies such as reinstatement of the employee, back pay, and other corrective actions.

Recent Developments and Challenges

Despite the robust framework, challenges remain. According to a recent report, there is a significant backlog of whistleblower cases, and new initiatives have yet to significantly reduce these issues. Moreover, the penalties for violations are often perceived as insufficient to deter future misconduct.

Additionally, the "Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect" report by AFL-CIO highlights that while progress has been made, more work is needed to ensure that all workers can report unsafe conditions without fear of retaliation. The report calls for increased funding and staffing for OSHA to handle the growing responsibilities and emerging hazards effectively.

Sources:

1. <https://aflcio.org/reports/dotj-2024>
2. <https://www.whistleblowers.gov/>
3. <https://www.osha.gov/workers/file-complaint>
4. <https://www.osha.gov/publications>

Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect, 2024 from the AFL-CIO



The AFL-CIO has released the 2024 edition of "Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect," which highlights the current state of worker safety and health protections in the U.S. Despite significant progress over the past 50 years, the report reveals alarming statistics, such as the 5,486 workers who died on the job in 2022 and the disproportionate fatality rates among Black and Latino workers. This underscores the ongoing risks faced by workers and the need for continued vigilance and advocacy for improved workplace safety.

The report also details the challenges posed by employer opposition and political attacks on worker protections. It calls for increased funding and support for safety agencies to enforce regulations and protect workers effectively. We encourage all members to read the full report and to stay informed about the vital issues affecting worker safety. Together, we can work towards creating safer and healthier workplaces for everyone.

Visit www.aflcio.org/reports to download the PDF.



The Association of Skilled Trade and Transportation Unions (ASTTU) is a not-for-profit founded in 2019. We are committed to the advancement, protection, and betterment of skilled trade and transportation unions and the workers that they represent.

Unite for Strength: Join as a Union Leader

Join a broad network of trade and transportation unions to expand your union's effectiveness. Collaborate with fellow leaders to increase the collective voice and influence of your members, building a more resilient community. You'll have access to extensive resources, advocacy tools, and opportunities that strengthen your union's impact and unity.

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