

THE PROMISE OF THE CONFIDENTIAL CLOSE CALL REPORTING SYSTEM

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As railroad operations grow more complex, teasing out the factors that contribute to accidents and developing successful countermeasures becomes more difficult. Within the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Office of Research and Development is seeking innovative methods to tackle this challenge. One of the methods is the use of close call reports to learn about hazardous conditions and activity before they result in harm. A close call is “an opportunity to improve safety practices in a situation or incident that has a potential for more serious consequences.” The FRA is supporting the development, implementation, and evaluation of a Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C³RS) to learn how to successfully operate this kind of safety intervention in the railroad industry. Using a consensus based approach, a steering committee representing the key industry stakeholders from labor, management and the regulator, developed the core principles by which the system would operate and defined each stakeholders responsibilities. A third party, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) agreed to accept the close call reports, provide the statute and legal authority to keep the reports confidential. BTS interviews the employees who submit close calls and sends the information they collect with direct and indirect identifiers removed to the demonstration sites for analysis. BTS also analyzes trends in the data within and across sites and communicates with the demonstrations sites to share lessons learned. At each participating railroad, a Peer Review Team (PRT) consisting of local managers, labor representatives and the regulator was established for the purpose of analyzing the close call events to uncover why they occur and to recommend corrective actions. The PRT also evaluates the effectiveness of the corrective actions, and shares responsibility for rolling out and maintaining the system within the individual demonstration site. On February 1, 2007, BTS began accepting reports from the first demonstration site. The key challenges this early in the demonstration project are associated with process issues. These processes revolve around providing employees with incentives to report, obtaining useful information from the reporting employee through effective interview techniques, providing useful information for the PRT to analyze, the effectiveness of the process for analyzing why close calls occur and the effectiveness of the corrective actions to prevent or mitigate the hazard.

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