## Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo Prepared Remarks 50th Meeting of the Railroad Safety Advisory Committee October 31, 2013 Washington, D.C.

Thank you, Bob. It's great to see everyone.

Today marks the end of a stressful month. The government shutdown forced us to put a lot of important work on hold. And since it ended, we've had a lot of catching up to do.

So let me thank my FRA staff for catching up so fast so that the RSAC could meet this week as planned.

As I said at the emergency RSAC meeting two months ago, we have a very important job to do.

The accident in Quebec took 47 lives. And at our last meeting, all of us saw the unforgettable images of a town that was decimated.

Given the depths of the devastation, given the tremendous increase in crude oil and ethanol being moved by rail, and given our shared desire to prevent a similar accident from happening in the United States, we owe the public both decisive action and a thorough re-examination of relevant regulations and industry practices.

We must also acknowledge that, since we last met, there was another accident in Canada – this one involving the derailment of four rail cars carrying crude oil.

The crude oil did not originate in the United States – and the damage was much less severe.

But it still serves as a reminder that we must we must do everything we can to prevent similar accidents from occurring in the United States.

This is why we are here.

FRA's first decisive action after the accident in Quebec was to issue an Emergency Order. This required railroads to take immediate steps within 30 days to prevent trains on mainline tracks or sidings from moving unintentionally.

And to begin our overall re-examination, we issued a Safety Advisory with our sister agency, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

Our Safety Advisory recommended additional ways railroads can further reduce risk in our complex, interconnected rail system — and through those efforts, further strengthen the safe transportation of passengers and freight, including hazardous materials, by rail.

At our Emergency Meeting, we began an honest discussion about these recommendations. The RSAC also agreed to accept task statements related to train securement, to hazardous materials, and to train crew size.

So let me thank you for your hard work on these tasks over the past three months, and especially those who attended the working group meetings the past three days.

There is no going back. Ensuring continuous safety improvement demands that we stay focused, we meet our April deadline, and we finish the job.

To be clear, we are not here because our rail system is unsafe — or because accidents of trains carrying hazardous materials are widespread.

Our rail system is extremely safe.

As I have said repeatedly, 2012 – by virtually all measures – was the safest year in railroading history, with train accidents down a remarkable 43 percent in 10 years.

And among the millions of annual shipments of hazardous materials by rail, less than a fraction of one percent of these has resulted in any type of release.

But this is exactly why we must remain vigilant.

Being satisfied with the progress made to date is simply not the mindset that has led us — or will continue to lead us — to higher levels of safety.

A new milestone achieved in safety is merely an invitation to do better.

The safety statistics of the MM&A before Lac Megantic did little to show an impending accident.

Yet with a thorough risk analysis it becomes clearer where pockets of risk were evident.

It presents a challenge to go beyond the statistics, to do thorough risk analyses, and to add the safety redundancy that takes away single points of failure.

But, this is how we will achieve the next breakthrough in safety, and get better at addressing accidents before they happen.

This is what we are committed to.

This is why we are here.

The safest year in railroading history did not happen by mistake.

Many of you in this room and many of your predecessors helped guide us there.

And it never would have happened without stringent regulations and enforcement; without extensive industry guidelines, practices, and testing; or without a well-trained and committed workforce.

But the RSAC's job now is to set aside any assumptions. Your charge here is to look at everything with a fresh set of eyes.

For the tasks related to hazardous materials and securement, this means a thorough reconsideration of existing regulations — and industry practices: from guidelines, to training, and efficiency testing.

And the goal is simple.

We must identify how regulations and practices can be improved. And if there are any gaps, we must find common sense ways to close them.

So far, the industry has shown us it is willing to move forward.

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, I sent letters to the Association of American Railroads, the American Public Transportation Association, and the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association. And the letter informed them that we were starting a web page to keep the public informed about their progress in implementing recommendations in the safety advisory.

In the letter, I asked the organizations to summarize the steps their members have taken to address our recommendation. And all three organizations — within weeks — responded with descriptions of their recent actions.

We posted our letters and the responses on the web page. And the industry associations will receive letters from us with additional questions very soon.

Our plan is to keep this page updated so we can have a public, transparent conversation.

Another project dovetailing with the work moving forward in the RSAC is what we're calling Operation Classification.

This is a joint inspection operation we launched with the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration in the Bakken region to verify that crude oil is being properly classified in accordance with federal regulations.

We are making sure that the testing to determine its classification is being done, while also analyzing the effects of corrosion in tank cars.

Collected samples are still being tested. And our goal, ultimately, is to establish best practices for the classification of hazardous materials.

Like us at the FRA, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration — as Administrator Cynthia Quarterman said at the emergency meeting — is determined to use all means necessary to prevent a tragedy on par with what happened in Canada here in the United States. And they remain a vital partner for the FRA as the RSAC's efforts move forward.

It is important to understand that our sister agency writes the regulations governing the safe movement of hazardous material by rail. We in turn enforce them.

And it's with your input that we'll recommend to them if current hazardous material regulations need to be revised or expanded.

With securement, the task is very similar – except the regulations are FRA's.

We are relying on you to thoroughly review both the adequacy of the regulations in place – and particularly how well these regulations are understood and followed. And we are relying on you to help us add more clarity to securement practices, and help us better understand what are truly the most effective practices for securing a train.

We are also asking you to take a hard look at the issue of train crew size.

As we have said from the beginning, FRA believes safety is enhanced through the use of multiple-person crews. And while we want this to continue being a robust conversation that recognizes the nuance of railroading, two days ago Bob made our position very clear: The starting point for our discussion is mandating multiple-person crews.

Now, this does not mean we are seeking to impose a single one-size-fits-all approach.

And as I've said before, this cannot be viewed as a job security measure.

So, while we believe that multiple-person crews enhance safety and eliminate risk from our vast rail network, we also believe there are instances in which multiple-person crews may not be necessary.

The starting point for our conversation is to identify what these exceptions should be.

We're relying on you to help us with this and I believe that no other group is more qualified — or more capable — of identifying the proper exceptions than you.

The public is counting on us to make timely progress.

So, let's have this conversation and meet the April deadline.

And let's seize this opportunity to build upon the comprehensive safety framework that made last year the safest in railroading history.

This is why we are here.

Thank you very much.