

# Honoring safety excellence: 2008 Safety Bell recipients

BNSF awards Safety Bells each year to recognize the divisions, Mechanical work groups and Engineering work groups that lead the way with their safety performance.

**P**roving themselves as safety leaders helped the Chicago Division, the Commerce Locomotive Shop in Commerce, Calif., and Engineering's System Rail Maintenance team earn distinction as 2008 Safety Bell Award recipients. Safety Bells are awarded annually for safest performance by a division, a Mechanical work group and an Engineering team in the following areas: Best Frequency Ratio, Best Severity Ratio and Best Derailment Performance. Special Recognition Safety Bells may also be awarded for outstanding safety performance.

## Chicago Division

Identifying at-risk behavior and addressing slip, trip and fall injuries helped the Chicago Division earn two Safety Bell awards for the safest-performing division. The division achieved the lowest frequency ratio at 1.55 injuries per 200,000 work hours in 2008 to earn the bell for the Best Frequency. The division was also recognized for maintaining the lowest severity ratio (45.38), reflecting lost and restricted days due to reportable injury, garnering the Best Severity Bell.

By focusing on slip, trip and fall injuries, the division reduced the number and severity of these types of injuries by nearly 12 percent in 2008. As a part of this effort, the division standardized employee anti-slip footwear well before the winter season, ensuring that employees had items they needed before the season began.

Division management stressed employee responsibility in speaking up about co-workers whom they perceived as being at risk. The Suburban 14th Street Mechanical and Aurora Hill Yard teams led the way for modeling a safe workplace, focusing on peer-to-peer communications and work practice observations. Local site-safety teams tackled challenging safety issues throughout the year and helped with proactive safety efforts. According to Kevin Rainey, safety manager, Chicago Division, site teams at Galesburg and Chillicothe East (Ill.), and La Crosse (Wis.), identified and standardized crew van pickup points in the Chicago area, reducing crew exposure and wait times.

The division also stepped up its communication efforts. "Communication is certainly a driver in helping create a safe workplace," says Rob Reilly, general manager for the division. The division used various communication channels to keep employees informed, including:

- Peer-to-peer communications
- First-line supervisor communication
- Site-safety team videos
- Safety marathons
- Job safety briefings

"The 3,500 employees of the Chicago Division made the conscious choice to eliminate risk from their work practices," Reilly says.

## Commerce Locomotive

Representing the Mechanical work group, the Commerce Locomotive facility in Commerce, Calif., netted two Safety Bell Awards for Best Frequency and Best Severity. The shop, a joint effort between BNSF and General Electric (GE), turned in an exemplary safety performance, indicated by its frequency and severity ratios, which both totaled 0.00 in 2008. The achievement continues a 600-day injury-free streak for the 110 shop employees.

Richard Castanon, general foreman, locomotives, Commerce, says that last year the facility:

- Serviced 14,000 locomotives
- Pumped 28.8 million gallons of fuel
- Shopped 2,246 locomotives
- Performed 1,351 maintenance activities

"We could not have completed this work injury free without a strong sense of teamwork between BNSF employees and GE employees," says Castanon.

In addition, shop supervisors worked to continuously improve safety. This included giving detailed job safety briefings, identifying opportunities to eliminate risk during facility audits and improving facility housekeeping standards. For instance, the shop identified an opportunity to improve the ballast in the diesel service area that enhanced footing conditions.

The shop also emphasized rules compliance. Janelle Bailey, GE shop manager, ensured that job safety analyses were available to employees, and BNSF Equipment Supervisor Russ Abbott helped reinforce operational rules.

Castanon spent one-on-one time with employees to communicate his desire for employees to work safely. "To me, no injury is acceptable," Castanon says. "What we do here affects other employees at BNSF. Not only do I want us to work without injuries, I want our output to help other employees work injury free as well."

## System Rail Maintenance

The 135 employees of Engineering's System Rail Maintenance team secured the Best Frequency Safety Bell for the lowest frequency ratio at 1.51, decreasing their injuries by 35 percent from the previous year. The team is responsible for system rail and switch grinding, rail detection, rail recovery, rail welding plants and division welding support.

Michael Nuorala, general director, Rail, attributes the team's reduction in injuries to teamwork and personal accountability.

Employees focused on rules compliance, situational awareness, recognition and personal attitudes. Nuorala also challenged employees to model safety each day.

Nuorala credits every team member for individually helping eliminate risk and notes that they have many safety leaders. For example, employees of the Springfield, Mo., welding plant have worked more than 1,500 days injury free while other team members have worked entire careers without an injury. "These people are the core of our team's safety culture," says Nuorala.

Bill VanHook, assistant vice president and chief engineer, System Maintenance and Planning, agrees that winning the Safety Bell was a team accomplishment. "I am proud of this team's focus on hazard recognition and risk assessment, and, most importantly, their willingness to observe each other's behaviors in the workplace to prevent injuries from occurring," he says. "I congratulate all of the rail team members on an outstanding safety performance."

## Telecommunications

Continuing to emphasize core safety principles, the Telecommunications work group received the 2008 Best Severity Safety Bell for an Engineering-related group. Maintaining the lowest severity ratio at 21.56, which reflects lost and restricted days due to reportable injury, the group aligned its Safety Action Plan around the *Making Safe Decisions* program. First-line supervisors led classes in breakout sessions and team exercises, emphasizing at-risk behaviors.

The Telecommunications team again targeted four areas:

- Safety awareness
- Individual ownership of personal safety
- Focusing on the task at hand
- Watching out for other employees

Particularly last year, the team kept higher-risk activities top of mind, according to Susan Borsellino, director, field operations, Central, Telecommunications. These included focused job safety briefings, timely communication on rules and mitigating potential risks associated with tower, tunnel and disaster recovery projects.

"Winning a Safety Bell requires every member of the team committed to working



safely and executing that commitment,” says Gary Grissum, assistant vice president, Telecommunications. “I’m proud that our team performed very well in reducing our most severe injuries.”

## Powder River Division

Exhibiting a safety commitment at every level, the Powder River Division received the 2008 Best Derailment Performance Safety Bell. Working together, the division reduced:

- Human factors derailments by 67 percent
- Track-caused derailments by 56 percent
- Equipment-caused derailments by 13 percent

Powder River General Manager Tom Albanese credits a robust safety culture for the improvements. “Everyone – including employees, safety coordinators, site-safety team members, labor leaders and supervisors – walks the walk,” he says. New to the division, he immediately noticed employee desire to work safely, which has been a major factor in the division’s overall safety performance.

Division employees identified and attacked risk through peer-to-peer communications and work practice observations, says Niel Niemi, senior safety manager. Employees also voluntarily attended enhanced safety training that focused on improved communication and quality job safety briefings.

“All departments produced this success,” says Albanese. “Our Mechanical employees performed quality inspections and dealt promptly with equipment issues. Our Engineering team provided outstanding physical plant support, and our Transportation group operated trains safely.”

## Suburban Services

The Special Recognition Safety Bell is awarded to a group that significantly contributed

to the overall safety record of BNSF. In 2008, BNSF’s Suburban Services Mechanical team of 170 did just that. The team handled heavy maintenance for coach cars and locomotives as well as daily servicing for 100 Chicago commuter trains that carried more than 11 million passengers last year. Altogether, the group maintained 33 locomotives and 202 passenger cars, turning in an injury-free performance (0.00 frequency and severity ratios).

According to Larry Stover, shop superintendent, managers and craft employees worked together to forge a safety partnership. Together, the group ensured that safety remained the No. 1 issue for each employee, each day. They also identified complacency as the shop’s primary at-risk behavior and took specific steps to actively engage employees. Led by Camilla Delemor and Mario Wilkins, safety assistants for the Transportation Communications Union, employees increased participation in work practice observations to 50 percent.

Communication also played a vital role. First-line supervisors were more visible and accessible, and the group hosted 21 safety blitzes, offering opportunities for one-on-one communication.

Says B.J. Ryan, assistant vice president and chief mechanical officer, South, “I’m very proud of the Suburban Services Mechanical team. They worked very hard to turn around their safety culture by driving more active involvement and ownership in the safety process.”

## California Engineering

By focusing on safe decisions and minimizing risks, the California Engineering team received the 2008 Special Recognition Safety Bell. The team ended the year with a 0.15 frequency ratio and a 0.00 severity ratio, or, as Jeff Owen, general director, Maintenance, says, “For 364 days, every one of our 500 employees went home without an injury.”

To work injury-free, employees personalized safety. They worked to reduce risk by identifying and eliminating barriers to safety, and also by ensuring adequate time to do the job. Personal accountability at all levels, from supervisors to craft employees, was also an area of focus.

Jack Clements, safety assistant for the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED), says that fellow workers

## Employee safety tips



“While driving, heed the ‘rules of the road,’ and always look and listen at every railroad crossing.”

– Cheri Bonebrake, field safety coordinator, Minot, N.D.



“Know where you and your crew are supposed to be. Remind each other of the rules.”

– Dwain Haitt, conductor, Lafayette, La.

## Focus on Safety

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### SAFETY VISION

We believe every accident or injury is preventable. Our vision is that BNSF will operate free of accidents and injuries.

feel a strong family bond. “Our employees take pride in working safely and looking out for their co-workers,” says Robert Coronado, BMWED safety assistant.

“Employees decided they would not cut corners,” says Owen. “Everyone has a critical voice in their own safety, and we realize that safety does not take a day off.”

Mark Schulze, vice president, Safety, Training and Operations Support, believes that these teams prove that safety excellence can be achieved. “I congratulate each of these teams for their commitment to safety. Their example is a model for us all.” 

# Switching Checklist

MWOR Rule 6.5, GCOR 5.3.7, 6.27-6.28

## REVIEW

- Did your job safety briefing clearly communicate:
  - That protection is needed?
  - Who is protecting the point?
  - How protection will be provided, for example:
    - Riding the point, or
    - Going ahead in a van?
  - Whether the crew member providing protection can see the point at all times during movement?
  - Possible hazards, such as close clearances?

## READINESS

- If you are providing protection, are you focused solely on the movement?
- Do you know the maximum speed for shoving cars on a main track or controlled siding?
  - Freight trains – 20 mph
  - Passenger trains – 30 mph
- If you are using the radio for handling cars, did the crew member provide:
  - The direction? Use “ahead” and “backup” to move the locomotive.
  - The distance? Use 50 ft. as a standard car length.

## ROUTINE

- Are you prepared to control the movement at a speed that allows you to stop within half the range of vision while operating under the provisions of GCOR 6.27 or 6.28?
- If you are protecting a shoving movement while operating under the provisions of GCOR 6.27 or 6.28, can you stop short of:
  - Trains?
  - Engines?
  - Rail cars?
  - Men and equipment fouling track?
  - Stop signals?
  - Derails and switches improperly lined?
  - X-crossings at grade?
  - Other crews’ movements?
- Did you use half plus car counts to complete the movement?
  - Did you say the minimum final car count: “Two cars, one car, 25 feet, stop”?

