



Share Knowledge ~ Save a Life
ZERO FATALITIES



SOFA ALERT

PLEASE POST IMMEDIATELY

August 13, 2020: Crossett, AR – An employee protecting a shove movement into a customer warehouse was fatally injured after encountering a close clearance situation and contacting a loading dock.

October 11, 2020: Richmond, VA – An employee protecting a shove movement into a track was fatally injured after encountering a close clearance situation and contacting a box car on an adjacent track.

November 11, 2020: Tuscola, IL – An employee protecting a shove movement into a customer siding was fatally injured after encountering a close clearance situation with a fence and was struck by the equipment.

Take Away

While these recent cases have not yet been analyzed, the SOFA Working Group is concerned by the 159 injuries that occurred this year through August 31, 2020 and reminds all employees to remain vigilant during switching operations by not only protecting the shove movement, but also protecting themselves by avoiding close or no clearances hazards. Last, but not least, remember to always hold a job briefing whenever the job or situation changes.

Most Common Findings in Switching Operations Fatalities



As a cross-industry collaboration for over 20 years, the SOFA Working Group has identified the Possible Contributing Factors for more than 210 switching operations fatalities since 1992. The SOFA Working Group reports its finding and emerging data trends with the goal of zero fatalities in the railroad industry.



SOFA Lifesavers

Share Knowledge ~ Save a Life ~ Zero Fatalities

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Why Avoid Close / No Clearances?

1 in 4 switching operations fatalities due to a close or no clearance 

Case Example: A two-person RCL crew shoved five empty cars into a snow-covered industry track. Ice build-up on the track caused the lead car of the movement to derail. The RCL operator, riding the lead car and controlling the move, was crushed against the side of an industry building and fatally injured. **Take Away:** Before starting a move, check for obstructions that may prevent clearance for a crew member riding a car, and discuss the hazard during the job briefing.

What?

A close or no clearance is a permanent or temporary safety hazard involving insufficient or no space for an employee to take evasive action to avoid being struck if passing or being passed by an object, structure, or equipment.

When?

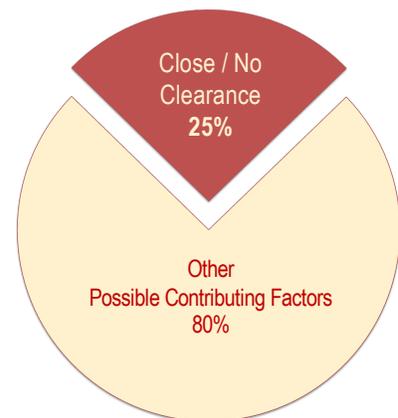
Close or no clearances can occur due to a fixed structure that remains in the same location day to day, such as a building, or when a movable object, such as a stack of cross ties, passes by an employee or an employee passes.

How?

So employees know when to walk, or when and where to ride, establish “defensive switching” standards on how to handle close/no clearance situations, including the following:

- Look for hazards. Encourage inspection of the work site before acting.
- Ride the side away from hazards.
- Plan for the worst-case scenario, such as a derailment, and prepare an escape strategy.
- Maintain focus and avoid distractions, such as holding unnecessary conversations, doing paperwork, or using cell phones.
- Expand job briefings to emphasize issues such as:
 - Dangers of equipment left fouling.
 - Warnings to other crews when placing oversized cars on tracks adjacent to their work.
 - Location & potential for close/no clearances.

- ✓ Eliminate close/no clearances, re-engineer where feasible, and/or report as required.
- ✓ Improve signage to be instructional, such as “Stop and Dismount.”
- ✓ Mark all permanent close/no clearances with highly visible signs.
- ✓ Prepare employees to identify & avoid close/no clearances.



Most Common Findings in Switching Operations Fatalities

Close / No Clearance

25%

Inexperienced Employee

22%

Industry Hazard

21%

Inadequate Job Briefing

20%

Struck by Mainline Train

17%