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Working Conditions for Train Crews to Improve with New Federal Regulations to Help Prevent Hearing Loss

Train crews will be less likely to suffer problems with hearing loss as the result of revised federal standards aimed to enhance the safety and well being of railroad employees by limiting locomotive cab noise, announced Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph H. Boardman.

“Locomotive engineers, conductors, and other rail employees shouldn’t have to run the risk of hearing loss just for doing their jobs,” said Boardman, noting that the final rule on Occupational Noise Exposure for Railroad Operating Employees is published in today’s *Federal Register*. “Reducing noise will safeguard train crews and can help improve overall rail safety,” he added.

Boardman explained that the final rule will directly affect approximately 80,000 rail employees and amends existing federal noise standards to require that railroads perform routine noise monitoring and provide training to employees in hearing loss prevention. In addition, train crews are required to use hearing protection.

The final rule also requires the integration of noise reduction features into the design, manufacturing and maintenance of locomotives, Boardman said. This includes standards for better insulation, relocation of air brake exhaust piping, and a reduction in vibration from cab equipment. Some of these features are already being incorporated into newer locomotives.

Also, FRA strongly believes these changes will reduce the incidence of noise-induced hearing loss, which may improve train crew communication as well as reduce the risk of accidents caused by occupational stress and fatigue, said Boardman.

FRA’s Railroad Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC), a consensus oriented rulemaking body comprising representatives of the railroad industry, rail labor, manufacturers, suppliers and others, examined the issue of occupational noise exposure and recommended the new standards. In developing the final rule, FRA incorporated comments from many interested parties, including locomotive engineers, audiologists, and rail labor organizations.

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