



NEWS RELEASE
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PSC’s Railroad Safety Program Works to Improve Safety, Reliability of Rail System

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) today released 2017 inspection data from the agency’s Railroad Safety Program, which shows the program continues to identify defects and violations that may result in accidents.

“State rail inspectors covered a lot of ground in 2017 and consistently found areas to improve the safety of the system and avoid derailments,” Commissioner Julie Fedorchak, who holds the Railroad Portfolio, said. “They issued multiple violations related to wheel defects, side bearing problems, and switch issues all of which have a direct relation to derailments. Most importantly, the program works to promote a strong safety culture and a reliable rail system that is safe for communities and efficient for the agriculture, energy, manufacturing and other key industries that depend on it.”

The program consists of two inspectors who focus on two disciplines: (1) track and (2) motor power & equipment (mechanical). These areas were selected because statistics show they contribute to the largest number and most severe accidents in North Dakota. The inspectors categorize their findings as either informational, defect, or violation. The chart below outlines the inspection data for 2017.

		2017 Calendar Year
Mechanical Inspector	Cars Inspected*	9,661
	Defects	1,687
	Violations	36
Track Inspector	Units Inspected**	3,576
	Defects	1003
	Violations	13

* Cars inspected consist of all rolling stock, not including locomotives. Each car may consist of multiple units or regulations inspected.

** One unit consists of one mile of track, a switch or turnout, and/or a single derail.

Defect: Conditions that do not meet the minimum requirements prescribed by the FRA and do not pose imminent danger but, if not addressed, could develop into a more serious problem.

Violation: A more serious problem that requires more immediate attention. Violations trigger various compliance strategies depending on the severity such as fines, reduced speeds or taking equipment out of service.

The inspectors have jurisdiction within their respective disciplines throughout North Dakota and conduct inspections on more than 3,000 miles of track, class I and short line locomotives and rolling stock. The inspectors work with railroad personnel to establish working relationships and gain cooperation and report that railroads have been very receptive to the program.

Commissioner Brian Kroshus said, “As oil production increases, we will again see a greater reliance on rail transport for crude oil. The inspectors continue to find defects to address in the system, which improves public safety and supports the need for continuing the program.”

The State Railroad Program was advanced by the Commission and approved in 2015 by the Legislature along with the authority to hire two inspectors. The inspectors are hired by and entirely accountable to the PSC. They are trained and certified by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and work in partnership with the federal inspectors to provide stronger oversight of the state’s vast rail network. The state inspectors inspect to the federal safety standards and have the same enforcement authority and tools as the federal inspectors.

The Railroad Safety Program is not funded with general fund dollars, but with an existing diesel fuel tax the railroads pay, a portion of which is dedicated for safety improvements.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission is a constitutionally created state agency with authority to permit, site and regulate certain business activities in the state including electric and gas utilities, telecommunications companies, power plants, electric transmission lines, pipelines, railroads, grain elevators, auctioneers, commercial weighing devices, pipeline safety and coal mine reclamation. For more information, contact the Public Service Commission at (701) 328-2400 or www.psc.nd.gov.

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2017 PSC Rail Safety Program Inspection Data

Top Five Defect & Violation Categories

Mechanical

Category	Description	Defects	Violations
Freight Car Safety Standards	Minimum Federal safety standards for railroad freight cars. Items within this category make up the individual components of a freight car (Wheels, roller bearings, couplers, car bodies, etc)	415	24
Reflectorization or Rail Freight Rolling Stock	Reflectorization is intended reduce highway-rail grade crossing accidents and deaths, injuries, and property damage resulting from those accidents, by enhancing the conspicuity of rail freight rolling stock so as to increase its detectability by motor vehicle operators at night and under conditions of poor visibility.	47	0
Safety Appliance Standards	Federal safety standards for position, condition, and use of safety appliances on all railroad cars and locomotives (hand holds, sill steps, end platforms, ladders, etc.)	724	8
Brake System Safety Standards	Federal safety standards for train brake systems and equipment.	298	4
Operating Practices Securement of Locomotive/Equipment	Federal safety standards for the proper securement of equipment (i.e. car hand brakes)	1	0

Track

Category	Description	Defects	Violations
Continuous Welded Rail	Federal safety standards for continuous welded rail.	38	1
Rail Joints	Federal safety standards for jointing rail together with joint bars and insulated joint bars.	241	4
Turnouts and Crossings	Federal safety standards for securely anchoring turnout and crossing components.	439	0
Switches	Federal safety standards for the condition, wear, and operation of railroad switches. Switches are equipment that enables trains to transfer from one track to another.	38	1
Frogs	Federal safety standards for condition and wear of frog. A frog is a component within a railroad switch that guides and ensures wheels do not derail while transferring to another track.	17	2

2017 PSC Rail Safety Program Inspection Data

2017 Mechanical Violations

Violation Description	Number of Violations
Freight car wheel having a high wheel flange. (The flange is the thick inner side of the wheel that keeps the car guided down the tracks and through switches)	2
Freight cars having broken side bearings. (Crude Oil/Hazmat Cars)	11
Freight car wheel having a thin wheel flange. (The flange is the thick inner side of the wheel that keeps the car guided down the tracks and through switches)	2
Freight car having a broken handholds and sill steps. (Railroad employee safety hazard)	8
Freight car missing a break beam rendering the air brakes and hand brake inoperative.	1
Freight cars having broken side bearings. (Non-Hazmat Freight Car)	6
Hand Brake Not Secured	1
Wheel Shelling (Surface damage to the wheel tread in contact with the rail)	3
Brake Rigging Missing Parts	1
Brake test not conducted at designated location.	1

2017 Track Violations

Violation Description	Number of Violations
Mismatch in rail joint bar size vs. size of rail	3
Broken switch point	1
Bolt holes for joint bar were drilled next to rail defect.	1
Operating on defective rail without proper remedial action.	1
Wide gauge on curved portion of track.	1
Fouled ballast. Insufficient drainage.	1*
Tread on switch frog worn beyond allowable limit.	1
Hand Brake Not Secured	1
Insufficient flange depth on switch frog.	1
Ties under frog not solidly tamped up to frog.	1*
Failure to comply with continuous welded rail requirements. Track did not have enough tie anchors.	1

* Condition had been previously identified as a defect and notice was given to the railroad. Follow-up inspection found condition had not been corrected. Failure to correct condition resulted in violation.