

February 20,2003

Docket # TR-021465

Honorable, Marilyn Showalter
Chairmen ,
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
1300 S. Evergreen Park Drive SW.
Olympia , WA.98504-7250

RECEIVED
FEB 25 2003
STATE OF WASHINGTON
UTIL. AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION
RECORDS MANAGEMENT
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Dear Ms. Showalter

My name is John Lawson and I'm a Locomotive Engineer. I started working for the Railroad in April of 1989 as a switchmen. Over the last thirteen years I've also had the opportunity to work as a Brakeman ,Hossler and conductor.

I'm writing this letter to express my concerns regarding the use of remote control train operation in the state of Washington; and ask you to ban their use.

When I was trained as an engineer and until the implementation of remote control operation. Trains have been handled by Federally licensed engineers. Engineers were trained to standard specified by the FRA based on technical knowledge and federal regulation and licensed to assure minimum technical knowledge and health standards with some scrutiny given to ones past such as D.W.I to maintain a margin for public safety.

Simply stated to operate a train you had to comply with federal law and the licensing process assured compliance. Currently their are no laws to regulate remote control train operation at the state or federal level. I'm very concerned that the FRA has only made very general recommendations and essentially left it up to the railroads to determine qualifications for individuals to operate (RCO)trains. I also find it alarming that minimum safety and operator health standards are at the discretion of the rail road an organization who's stated purpose is to generate profit. One should note most rail roads are corporations with no one person responsible for the companies actions.

I was promoted to engineer after having worked as a Switchmen, Brakeman, Hossler (roundhouse or service track engineer) and conductor for four years. When I entered the engineer training program I was shocked how little I knew. Nearly four months later I took my final exam attended school at Johnson County Community Collage (JCCC) in Kansas and received training similar to that of an apprenticeship having been assigned to qualified

experienced engineers who over saw everything I did in compliance with federal laws.

RCO operators are switchmen who have received a class two weeks long .One week of class room training and one week hands on in the field . There on is essentially trial and error.

In the worst case scenario a person can be hired off the street with no previous experience. Take a company sponsored month of training on the fundamentals of railroad at JCCC. Then take his RCO class and with a total of six weeks training and essentially no experience be assigned to handle thousands of tons of train in communities around the state. handling an untold numbers of hazardous materials in quantities as large 30,000 gallons per rail car.

I would like to point out that when a person hires out with most railroads in the operating department you start as a switchmen. Switchmen is the entry level position. This position is paid the least because it is the least responsible ,least trained and always has some that are the least experienced.

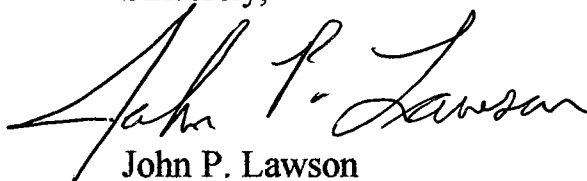
Every day thousands if not millions of tons of hazardous materials are switched in yards, moved to and from industries and travel through our communities in Washington by rail. These are products that if handled with trial and error could have catastrophic consequences to the railroad employee and any public for miles around the tracks. Currently this is done with licensed, regulated, and experienced engineers.

Soon the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad will begin implementation of RCO's in Pasco. I think this is a mistake that will cost millions of dollars and in my opinion many lives before this corporation a thousand miles away will admit error or fault when faced with potential profit and corporate greed.

I would again like to urge you and your office to ban remote control train operation in the state of Washington.

Thank you for your attention to this problem. Please feel free to contact me any time.

Sincerely,



John P. Lawson

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