

For Immediate Release:
February 13, 2007

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TEAMSTER RAIL OFFICIAL TESTIFIES TO CONGRESS ON THREAT OF WORKER FATIGUE

Safety of Workers and the Public at Risk

(Washington D.C.)— A Teamsters Rail Conference official told the House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials today that worker fatigue is a significant safety threat to rail workers and the public.

“There is no question in our minds that safety degradation because of fatigue is a ticking time bomb in the rail industry,” said Tom Pontolillo, Director of Regulatory Affairs of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), which is part of the Teamsters Rail Conference. “The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has on numerous occasions pointed to crew fatigue as a potential contributing factor in an accident.”

Last year the NTSB adopted a report determining that the 2004 Macdona, Texas, collision and toxic chlorine release, which killed three people, was caused by a fatigued locomotive crew’s failure to respond to wayside signals. The crew was criticized by the NTSB for failing to effectively use off-duty time, thereby not obtaining sufficient restorative rest prior to reporting for duty and Union Pacific was criticized for train crew scheduling practices that created inverted crew members’ work and rest patterns.

“Like the operating crafts, maintenance of way forces are also affected by fatigue most often caused by long commutes, inadequate overnight lodging and lack of manpower,” Pontolillo said. For example, a maintenance of way crew member employed on Burlington Northern Santa Fe is required to report for assignments anywhere on a more than 32,000-mile route system covering two-thirds of the territory of the United States.

“Congress must put an end to the failed policies which created these fatigue issues,” said John Murphy, Director of the Teamsters Rail Conference and Teamsters Vice President. “The rail corporations such as BNSF, NS, CSX, UP and others are simply preying upon the fears of workers losing their jobs if they don’t go along with extended work schedules and over-blown work territories.”

“Rail corporations are simply not taking the safety and security of rail workers and the public seriously,” Murphy said.

The Teamsters Rail Conference represents more than 70,000 locomotive engineers, trainmen and maintenance of way employees on freight, passenger and commuter rail lines across the United States. The Rail Conference is a division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.