

Teamster Rail leaders from U.S., Canada to meet at safety conference

OTTAWA, Ontario — Teamster leaders from all rail divisions in the U.S. and Canada will meet in Las Vegas today to look for rail safety solutions and open a public debate on the issue.

"Rail corporations in the United States and Canada, despite raking in record profits, have delayed the necessary repairs that will ensure safety," said Jim Hoffa, Teamsters General President. "We hear reports nearly every month about how freight and passenger rail traffic has increased and how profits of the giant rail corporations continue to climb. But instead of hiring more track maintenance workers, the railroads try to make do with a skeleton staff. For the safety of the public and our members, the rail corporations need to realign their priorities."

The rail safety conference, beginning today (Friday, May 16) in Las Vegas, will bring together Teamsters representatives from the key areas of rail work, including engineers, conductors and track maintenance personnel.

Hoffa will attend the meeting along with members of the Teamsters General Executive Board as the Teamsters rail divisions unify and clarify the issues in anticipation of future meetings with the railways, including Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway.

"Teamsters Canada has been working with the Government of Canada to improve the Railway Safety Act," said Robert Bouvier, President of Teamsters Canada, representing 125,000 Canadian Teamsters - 11,000 of them employed on railways. "But to create a truly safe railway system, more needs to be done. We should make sure safety regulations that are already in place are strictly enforced and fully implemented. We should also make sure that all stakeholders - from government and business leaders to railway employees and the public - are actively involved and committed to develop solutions together."

"The issue of rail safety has two faces," said William Brehl, President of the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference MWED and recently appointed to the Transport Canada's Advisory Council on Railway Safety. "On the one hand, we have to make the railways safe for our members. On the other hand, we are responsible for the safety of all Canadians, including those who travel by rail and those who live near the rail tracks. There is no "duct tape" solution to the issues of rail safety, but one thing is for sure - this solution is going to take real commitment from all parties involved."

Canadian railways move long and heavy trains on a more frequent basis. Every day, these trains are transporting dangerous commodities through residential communities. A major derailment in a densely populated or environmentally sensitive area may have catastrophic consequences. All these factors mean a growing need for greater inspection and maintenance of both track infrastructure and equipment.

About TCRC-MWED

Teamsters Canada Rail Conference Maintenance of Way Employees Division (TCRC-MWED), a division of Teamsters Canada, represents more than 4,000 maintenance of way workers at Canadian Pacific Railway and almost two dozen short line railroads. Its members are involved in inspecting, monitoring and repairing the tracks, bridges and structures on the network. TCRC-MWED's mission is to make sure that the railway is safe, in spite of any economic, managerial or other obstacles.

