



NEWS RELEASE
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State Rail Safety Inspectors Receive Federal Certification

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission’s (PSC) new State Rail Safety Program has reached an important milestone – both inspectors have received national certification from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

The new program was advanced by the Commission in the PSC’s budget and approved in 2015 by the Legislature along with authority to hire two inspectors. The inspectors focus on two disciplines: track and mechanical. The two focus areas were identified as top priority because statistics show they contribute to the largest number and most severe accidents in North Dakota. The track inspector position was filled on Aug. 17, 2015, and received federal certification on March 7, 2016. The mechanical inspector position was filled Dec. 1, 2015, and received certification on Aug. 8, 2016.

Commission Chairman Julie Fedorchak said having both state inspectors certified within a year of launching the program is noteworthy. “The State Rail Program has quickly moved from concept to reality,” said Fedorchak “Today we have two state inspectors on the job every day enhancing third-party oversight of the rail system that is vital to our economy and runs through the heart of nearly every North Dakota community.”

The state inspectors are hired by and entirely accountable to the PSC. They are trained and certified by the FRA and work in partnership with the federal inspectors to supplement the FRA, the federal agency with primary responsibility for rail safety in every state. State inspectors inspect to federal safety standards and have the same enforcement authority and tools as federal inspectors. Both inspectors worked with FRA inspectors while earning their certifications. The certification now allows each inspector to work independently.

Since completion of certifications, inspections have been completed on 1,050 miles of track and 436 rail cars. A majority of the defects identified so far involved freight car standards, safety appliances, air brake systems, track rail end joints and fasteners used to secure track components to the ties. Defects are conditions that do not meet minimum requirements, but do not pose imminent danger. The inspectors have also issued nine violations for substandard conditions. Violations are more serious conditions that can result in civil penalties and require immediate attention.

The Rail Safety Program is funded by 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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