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Contact: David A. Bolger

Tel.: (202) 632-3124

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FRA Launches Safety Inspection Teams To Review Entire Union Pacific Railroad System

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) today launched round-the-clock inspections by 60 federal and state safety inspectors concerning operations on the Union Pacific Railroad (UP).

The inspection has been initiated to determine ways to improve railroad safety as a result of the Union Pacific's involvement in three railroad collisions resulting in the deaths of 7 people and millions of dollars in property damage over the past three months. Five other Union Pacific employees have been killed in five separate incidents since January of this year.

"Safety is our highest priority. The FRA's investigations of the recent collisions on the Union Pacific Railroad have led us to believe there are critical safety deficiencies present at some locations and immediate action across the entire UP system is necessary," stated FRA Administrator Jolene M. Molitoris. "This system-wide safety review will provide us with critical operational information for us to improve safety on this railroad."

The FRA started to review of Union Pacific operations Saturday, August 23, with a moderate deployment of operating practices safety specialists at various points on the UP system. Today, the combined federal and state safety teams begin round-the-clock reviews for the next 7-10 days in the following locations: Chicago, Denver, Ft. Worth, Houston, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Omaha, Pocatello (ID) Portland (OR), Sacramento, and San Antonio.

Inspection reviews include: safety inspectors riding with select UP crews on trains throughout the system to determine whether the highest levels of operating practices are maintained; dispatching specialists overseeing operations in Omaha and Denver to monitor whether trains throughout the UP network are dispatched safely; and operating practices specialists conducting interviews with local railroad officials, train crews, labor representatives, managers and contractors to review safety operations and

practices to determine potential unsafe conditions. The FRA Administrator and senior FRA officials will be meeting this week in Washington with the CEO of Union Pacific, Jerry Davis, and senior UP officials to review preliminary findings of the team inspections.

Recent collisions prompting this team inspection by the FRA included:

- June 2, 1997 Devine, TX, two UP freight trains collided head-on. As a result of the collision, two crew members were killed as well as two stowaways.
- July 2, 1997 Kenefick, KS, a UP freight train in a siding struck the sixth head car of a passing UP intermodal train. As a result of the collision, the engineer of the westward train was killed.
- August 21, 1997 Fort Worth, TX, four unattended UP locomotives moving eastward at an estimated speed of 60 mph collided head-on with a UP freight train as it departed the UP's Centennial Yard. The freight train's engineer and engineer pilot were killed.

The FRA is assisting the National Transportation Safety Board in its investigations of the causes of these collisions.

The FRA has been working with the Union Pacific on operational management issues following UP's merger with the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP) in 1996. In the Department of Transportation's post-merger review filing before the Surface Transportation Board, the FRA identified problems in the train control, operating practices, training, train inspection, hazardous materials defects, and quality control at the dispatch centers on the UP rail network. The team inspectors will be reviewing these and other operational safety measures on the railroad.

The Union Pacific Railroad is the nation's largest railroad, employing more than 53,000 persons and operating over 36,000 miles of track in the western two thirds of the United States.

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Briefing Room