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Safety Alert: Roadway Maintenance Machines

This Safety Alert highlights the need for each roadway worker and RMM operator to be aware of the safety procedures for Roadway Workers who work around Roadway Maintenance Machines.

The industry has suffered three fatalities since December 2021 where an RMM struck a roadway worker. In each instance, the RMM was operating in reverse. In each of these accidents, the initial distance between the RMM and the roadway worker was greater than the specified “work/red zone” distance listed in the railroad’s on-track safety program. And in each instance, the operator of the RMM did not see the roadway worker standing in the foul of the track.

As part of the investigation in two of these accidents, it was discovered that the operator of the RMM would not have been able to easily see a roadway worker standing at the end of the “work/red zone” distance. RMMs have different functions and are built differently. While the railroad’s “work/red zone” distance might be suitable for one type of RMM, the “work/red zone” distance might not allow the operator on a different type of machine to see someone standing in the track.

One other common thread in the three fatality accidents was lack of communication between the roadway worker and the machine operator of the RMM. In all three accidents, the operators of the RMMs were unaware that a roadway worker had fouled the track. Communication between the roadway worker and the machine operator would have alerted the machine operator that workers were in the foul behind the RMM.

Recommendations:

- Each RMM operator review what your railroad’s on-track safety program lists as the “work/red zone” distance and see if you can see a roadway worker standing in front of or behind your machine when at the end of the “work/red zone” distance. If the “work/red zone” distance is not compliant, inform the workers who work around the machine and inform the supervisor of the team.
- Each roadway worker who is going to foul a track, communicate with the nearest RMMs in view in both directions from the location they will foul the track regardless of the “work/red zone” distance.
- Assure back-up alarms are functioning properly and sound your horn when making movements according to your operating rules.

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