

WPRM Safety Department News – May 2014

–Tom Carter, Director, Safety Officer

In railroading, safety is paramount. The same holds true for historical railroading. Whether you are working on the train crew, restoring a piece of equipment, cleaning the shop, or working behind the counter in the gift shop, it is imperative that we always keep safety in mind. While it is widely accepted that safety is a way of life next door on the Union Pacific, it is extremely important that we take a few moments to realize that safety is just as, if not more, important at the Western Pacific Railroad Museum. Over the past 30 years of the museum's existence, we have had a relatively good safety record, all things considered; however, as we know, there is *always* room for improvement. This is why, at the start of the 2014 season, I was appointed as the museum's *Safety Officer*.

My day job is deeply rooted in Rail Safety. As a partner in *Railroad Training Services*, I teach folks in shortlines and a variety of industries that switch their own railcars to not only run a locomotive or railcar mover, but also how to switch cars. However, the bigger focus on my job is how to do that work *safely*. The first few hours of each class is all about situational awareness, safe work habits and personal protection. We don't even explain how to line a switch until we ensure that *everyone* is firmly planted in a safety mindset. Just because those of us that volunteer at the museum do not earn a paycheck on the rails doesn't mean that we can cast safety aside to "get the job done". It's a safety trap as far as I am concerned, and one that I and several of your fellow FRRS members and volunteers are working hard to eliminate. To do this, we need your help.

Safety is not something you merely practice when "the boss may be watching", or even "as a condition of employment". Safety is *Always Doing the Right Thing, even when no one is watching*. Safety is a culture. It's automatic in the way one walks, talks, plays and works. There is potential for accidents and injuries in *every* aspect, place and activity in life. You are just as likely to be injured at home or at play as you are at work, sometimes even more so. A few minutes ago, I stepped out on my back patio, as I do several times a day, to smoke. In thinking of what I wanted to convey in this article, I noticed that I was smoking no more than *two feet* away from a propane tank. I barbecue *a lot*. I mean, I barbecue several times a week. For this reason, I always make sure I have an extra tank of propane handy. All of a sudden, with cigarette in

hand, it dawned on me: I was smoking not two feet away from a flammable propane tank, with the tank between myself and the fire extinguisher I keep out on the patio for the barbeque grill, making it virtually useless in the event of a fire. Needless to say, I felt pretty stupid. A), I shouldn't be smoking near that tank, B), the tank shouldn't be stored out there anyway, and C) the fire extinguisher needs to be mounted to the wall of the house, where I can get to it if I need it while grilling, not on the ground. Oh and mental note "*check the date and charge of that extinguisher*"! This, my friends, is what we on the railroad call a "site safety audit", and it only took a mere 10 seconds to do. It is a great habit to get into at home, work and the museum. I urge each of you to do the same. It may take a little longer than the 10 seconds mentioned above, but it could save a life.

Throughout the year and beyond, you are going to notice an increased safety presence at the museum and here in this newsletter. While some of it may seem draconian to you, or even extreme, please understand that it is for your benefit as well as our guests. This is not being done to appease an insurance company, nor is it being done to "feather one's cap" or even as the result of an incident: it is being done out of concern for the well being of everyone who sets foot on the property. While safety is the nucleus of my job both here and at work, I am nowhere near perfect and being only human, I welcome input and suggestions from *anyone and everyone*. At this time though, I am respectfully requesting the input and "buy-in" from everyone involved to improve the safety culture at the museum. In subsequent issues of the "Train Sheet", we will expand on this safety culture and how it affects *all of us*.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, I can be reached via e-mail at safety@wplives.org. I thank everyone in advance for your cooperation and look forward to many, many years of safe work and leisure at the museum with our fine volunteers and guests.

