

Commentary

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Safety Is About Our People at G&W: Railway Age CEO Perspectives on Safety

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At G&W, our most significant safety achievement is the safety culture we've built over the past two decades. For us, that culture isn't about numbers—though a rigorous rules compliance program and diligent reporting of personal injuries, human factor incidents and derailments are, undoubtedly, a key component. G&W's safety culture is truly about people and building a family atmosphere.

At the end of the day, we want every single employee—whether in the field moving freight for customers or in one of our corporate support centers enabling our railroads to work safely and efficiently—to go home to loved ones the same way they came to work.

Working toward this vision requires a consistent and proactive investment of time and resources, as well as a persistent drive to continuously improve our safety performance and increase employee engagement in safety. Whether it's monthly safety calls with our entire operational leadership, our annual June Safety Month campaign to get ahead of the industry's summer injury spike, culture assessments with the Short Line Safety Institute, the creation of our own Life Critical Rules for all three crafts, or recent efforts to roll out the Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C3RS) and FRA risk-reduction program across many of our railroads, we are willing to do more than just the regulatory requirements. At G&W, we will do whatever it takes to strengthen our safety culture and improve safety performance.

Our approach has delivered results year after year:

G&W has earned a track record of safety performance improvement—beginning by looking inward and achieving a 75% reduction in our own injury-frequency rate (IFR) from 2006-2012 and subsequently improving the IFR of acquired operations. For example, it took just two years for G&W to attain the same IFR it had reported the year prior to acquiring RailAmerica's 45 roads. Likewise, Arkansas Midland Railroad operated injury-free for three consecutive years after joining the G&W family, and Providence and Worcester Railroad's IFR decreased 53% the year following acquisition.

G&W railroads collectively have led the short line industry in safety since the early 2000s—sometimes by more than three times in a given year and even as we grew from a handful of operations to more than 100 total across North America. We have also received more than 1,000 Jake Awards with Distinction from the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association over the years. These are both tremendous accomplishments considering that short line railroads handle significantly more switching and short line employees move on and off rail equipment considerably more than Class I railroaders.

In 2023, 80 G&W railroads finished the year with zero reportable injuries, and as of March 1, 34 of our operations have been injury-free for more than a decade. These operations demonstrate that “zero injuries” is not just aspirational but very tangible, and they provide a blueprint for how our other railroads can replicate this success.

In celebrating our 125th anniversary this year, G&W is proud of our safety accomplishments, and we recognize that safety is tightly woven into the legacy we have been building since 1899. G&W's results are just the results of our people taking personal pride in working safely, caring about the wellbeing of their teammates, committing to delivering customers' products without incident, and understanding what it means to be good stewards of the communities we operate in. We have surpassed all expectations for what is possible at a short line, but we can't be complacent. G&W understands that safety is never fixed, and each of us is committed to putting in the work and passion necessary to continue operating safely for the century ahead.

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