

Failed

Chicken-Pack

Parts And Pieces

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The California Northern R.R. employee, who lost his leg to Chicken-Pack, will be returning to work as a conventional locomotive engineer. He will be back in the locomotive cab, where it's safer, and where he won't lose his other leg! If I, "R.B." Frank, were to lose one of my legs to Chicken-Pack, I wonder if BNSF would be benevolent enough to keep me on as a conventional engineer? "After being fitted with a prosthetic leg, I also wonder if I would technically live up to the 3-point contact rule for the purpose of boarding the locomotive?"

There was yet another Cleveland area man who lost his life to Chicken-Pack - this time, a steel worker. As usual, management loves to claim human error as the cause, as if that makes everything O.K. and [or forgivable and/ or understandable, hence rationalizable. I beg to differ! Take, for example, a circus tight-rope-walker who falls off the steel wire. Circus management would likewise claim human error as the cause of the fall - not the failure of the steel wire. Race car driving provides another obvious analogy, where again, most accidents are due to human error - not technology failure. The point being, even when the technology works, a dangerous activity can be made even more dangerous by the technology additions and leverages. In other words, there are more variables and things to go wrong, particularly with aged use in a physically harsh and dirty R.R. environment.

In spite of these safety issues, I have maintained from the very beginning that the future of Chicken-Pack will be detennined by its productivity-output and overall investment effectiveness or lack, thereof. A case in point: General Motors demanded of Norfolk Southern to remove Chicken-Pack from their auto assembly plant in St. Louis, MO. In addition to the "near misses" and "wabashing" of new automotive produce, ChickenPack's lower productivity-output resulted in untimely pulls of loaded auto-rack railcars; which in turn resulted in untimely respots of empty auto-rack railcars; which in turn disrupted the co-ordination in the loading of the new autos.

Similarly, General Motors demanded of Union Pacific to remove Chicken-Pack from their auto assembly plant in Fremont, CA over the same domino syndrome. To compensate for the untimely switching, U.P. offered to further discount G.M.'s already bargain rail rate,

while Chicken-Pack was in "transition," according to U.P. personnel. Naturally, as part of my sworn duty, I felt it necessary to network with some of the actual Chicken-Pack crews, who work G.M., Fremont to see what new complications, if any, Chicken-Pack is "laying."

The testimonials were remarkably similar. For example, the massive cuts of auto railcars are switched by a single locomotive, for which there is no belt-pack indication for "wheel-slip," which reveals itself only at night when the "fireworks" show can be seen, as the loco wheels are grindingly spinning out of control. Almost needless to say, this has resulted in many rail burn divits. Also, U.P. supervisors have literally begged these crews to "run" their "bean" breaks. Ironically, the extra physical stress, and even more significantly, mental stress imposed by Chicken-Pack, requires even more food nourishment and re-cooperation, hence longer "bean" breaks. Also, the Chicken-Pack operators routinely make non-reimbursed use of their personal automobiles when making long "shoves" to gain physical relief. (Is there some kind of a rule against this cheating? What if there was an auto accident? Who would be liable? The carrier or the employee?) Also, to prevent further loss of productivity-output, U.P. supervisors avoid Uniform Efficiency Testing of Chicken-Pack crews. In other words, operating rules aren't being enforced, which is a mute point, anyway, since Chicken-Pack accidents are "swept under the carpet." Rest ill-assured, however, when this "honeymoon" period of "transition" is over, the "rape period" will take its place, as did happen in Canada. Not only will you be expected to continue bastardizing the rules, but bastardize them all the more, as more and more unsafe productivity-output is expected, in both yard and mainline operations. Unfortunately, higher accountability and higher discipline will meet the paradoxical face of this rules bastardization.

Speaking of paradox, the vast majority of Chicken-Pack operators hate working with it, yet cheat with it anyway, as I shared in the above paragraph. As switchmen have said, "Working with Belt-Pack is worse than working with the worst engineer I ever had." It begs the question, why switchmen would want to cheat in its use? Naturally, rail management ignores Chicken-Pack cheating because it helps recover lost productivityoutput. Switchmen, on the other hand, risk \$15,000 FRA fines and being in Contempt of Court when operating Chicken-Pack from the cab! When asked, why do they operate it from the cab? Their alibi: "I set the speed control and went back into the cab to sit down." When asked, how do you reset the SafetyLTime-Out-Warning? Their alibi: "I step out of the cab about every 45 seconds to reset it." (You musical chaired liar!) When asked, how do you operate the whistle? Their alibi: "I step out of the cab and press the whistle button from my belt-pack." (You should be deaf liar!) Obviously, for these operators to perjure themselves means they are desperate for physical relief, which makes the Court ordered Injunction against its use from the cab neither practical nor enforceable.

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Therefore, the Injunction against Chicken-Pack should be to include banning it from all mainline operations, and while in yard operation, should ban operator entrance into the locomotive cab, while in yard motion.

The above Contempt of Court problem quite logically reminds me of the Montana Rail Link. Please allow me to explain. Montana Rail Link locomotive engineers pioneered in having the Chicken-Pack contract. In fact, today's UTU contract, which provides an extra

46 minutes of pay for Chicken-Pack use, was formulated on the Montana Rail Link. When it goes out of order, which is very often, one of the two Chicken-Pack operators can instantly return to the cab, and put the locomotive back in Conventional mode, leaving the other operator as a conventional switchman. Obviously, this saves having to wait an hour or two for an extraboard man to show up. In the hundreds of times this has happened, Montana Rail Link employees have proven more switching work gets accomplished with one conventional engineer in the cab and one conventional switchman on the ground than with two Chicken-Pack operators on the ground. How relatively telling! This accidental discovery (95% of discoveries are) begs the question, why the carriers are even bothering with the costs of Chicken-Pack ownership, let alone the expense of a third switchman-lookout? Thanks to the previously mentioned cheating of Chicken-Pack operators in the cab plus the Montana Rail Link, we now have Custom and Precedence enough to argue and/or negotiate for 1 + 1 switching jobs, which would match how mainline freight trains are currently crewed. After all, if top management is hellbent on two-man switching jobs, it appears the optimal combination would be this 1+1+ the option of far simpler radio controlled switch stands, which can be operated from most pack-set radios.

In conclusion, the failure of Chicken-Pack, and all its parts and pieces, to live up to carrier expectations, has top management backed into an embarrassing corner with no ego-riskless way out. So, how much extra death and/or amputation and/or customer delay and/or railcar per diem and/or electronic repair and/or rail damage and/or equipment damage and/or cargo damage and/or stadium lighting and/or radio repeaters and/or extra engines and/or overtime and/or D.O.L. trains and/or mainline congestion and/or yard hemorrhaging and/or interchange delay and/or productivity "book cooking" and/or accident hiding and/or rules bastardizing and/or contractual bastardization and/or resignation and/or etc., etc. will be required for a mean spirited management to concede it was all just a well intended experiment?... Probably never. In the meanwhile, we as locomotive engineers need to be better and safer than the feeble electronics, which are trying to replace us! After all, we are the ultimate form of computerization - God and/or nature given! Thanks Again.