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Risk Management Services

NATIONWIDE **N**SIGHT SOLUTIONS®

Railroad Sidetrack Agreements, Inspection and Safety Precautions

STAY ON TOP OF SIDETRACK SAFETY

Before You Start: Review Your Agreement

Reviewing your sidetrack agreement is an important part of protecting your operation. Sidetrack agreements allow railroads to transfer liability for damages and injuries to the company leasing the sidetrack. Damage to tracks, equipment, railcars, locomotives and vehicle crossings — along with injuries to railroad workers and other individuals — could end up being your responsibility. Knowing what you're responsible for under your agreement is extremely important.

Understand Your Insurance Protection

After an accident, insurance may cover sidetrack damage costs and lost income during the restoration period, but some of the loss (i.e. deductibles, administrative costs, lost opportunities and productivity) might not be covered. It's important to note that the loss and damage to others, including the railroad's rolling stock, may be your operation's responsibility. If an accident causes property damage or interruption of service on a rail company's main line, it's possible that your policy limits may not be enough.

Records Management

Appropriate records management procedures can help prevent accidents and lower potential liability. **The importance of the following recommendations can't be stressed enough:**

- Keep records to confirm that management systematically audits training, inspection and maintenance documentation to verify work is being completed in accordance with established requirements
- Keep records to confirm that management systematically evaluates workers' performance to verify they understand and follow all established policies and procedures
- Document employee training and authorized job assignments
- Schedule and document railroad sidings and equipment inspections and maintenance in a preventive maintenance planning system. Frequency depends on conditions and operations at each site. Consider the amount of lead time required to obtain replacement parts and schedule qualified specialty contractors

Physical Conditions

All fall prevention/protection equipment must be inspected and available for use before any work begins. This includes the overhead rail system, full body harnesses, lanyards and retractable lifelines. The items included below are standard, so your operation's layout and equipment may differ.

Sidetrack rails must be straight, level and flat. Anything less is a maintenance issue.

Drainage of track beds, especially around switches, must be maintained or pumping equipment must be provided to prevent water pooling. This is critical to prevent compression of ballast and subgrade and tie softening/deterioration, which are both derailment risk factors.

Ballast permits adequate drainage and load distribution. Ballast must be:

- Clean
- Free-draining
- Free of vegetation, soil (mud) and other foreign materials
- Lower than tie level (Ballast should never cover or exceed tie height)

Ties are the foundation for maintaining track gauge and alignment and serve to distribute the load from the rail to the ballast and subgrade. If ties soften or deteriorate (often from poor drainage), spikes can loosen, allowing the rail to shift position — one of the leading causes of derailments.

Three defective ties in a row are a hazard; five or more are an imminent hazard and the track should be taken out of service and repaired. All rail joints (where two rail sections meet) must be supported by at least one non-defective tie located within 18 inches of the joint. A tie is defective if it is:

- Rotted, hollow or deteriorated to the point where a large amount of material is decayed or missing
- Broken through at any point
- Split or impaired to the point that it won't hold spikes or other rail fasteners
- Deteriorated such that it allows tie plates to move more than 1/2 inch laterally
- Cut by a tie plate more than 2 inches
- Cut by wheel flanges, etc. to a depth of more than 2 inches within 12 inches of the base of the rail, frog or load-bearing area
- Any tie that won't support both rails

Tie plates keep the rail in position and distribute the applied loads from the rail to the tie. Tie plates are especially important on curves, where they provide additional lateral restraint.

Spikes fasten the rail to the tie plates and ties. The risk of derailment increases if spikes are missing or loose.

Gauge rods provide additional protection against rails shifting position in critical areas. Gauge rods should be installed at turnouts just ahead of the switch points and every 80' – 100' throughout a curved section. Gauge rods should be kept tight while maintaining the proper track gauge and replaced if bent or broken.

Rails that are split, cracked, broken or deformed present an imminent hazard and should be removed from service. Any rail head that is separated from the web (vertical section) should also be replaced. Other defects should be evaluated by a competent person to determine risk. Load rating of tracks (available from the rail carrier) should be sufficient to support loaded cars.

Vegetation must be controlled so it doesn't grow within the ballast or obstruct drainage; interfere with visibility at grade crossings, switch position indicators, signs or signals; or prevent proper track inspections.

Turnouts divert trains from one track to another. Major components are the switch, frog and guardrails. Good maintenance is essential because derailments often occur at switch points. Turnouts should be inspected before each use, with close attention paid to moving parts and switch points. Inspect for cracked, broken, loose, missing or deformed components and proper alignment and fit. Switch points must always be lubricated and operate freely. Remove any obstructions that may interfere with switch movement such as ice, snow and other debris.

Sidetrack Standard Operating Procedures

To ensure safety, the following Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) should be followed each time the sidetrack is used.

Brakes (Moving and Securing Cars)

- If any block of cars is disconnected from a locomotive or air brake system, at least one car's wheels must be effectively chocked and hand brakes set on a minimum of 10% of the cars plus one additional car
- Railcars must never be moved while hand brakes are fully applied. Wheels skidding along a rail will result in eventual wheel failure
- Hand brakes should never be left partially applied. This results in excessive heating and wheel damage if the cars are moved in this condition

Switching

- If cars or train must stop before a turnout, maintain at least a 50 ft (or one car length) distance from the switch. This prevents undue stress on the switch's moving parts and prevents parked cars from unintentionally moving through a switch when a locomotive is reconnected
- Switches must never be thrown until an entire block of connected cars passes through it; otherwise connected cars will be on two different lines

Communication

- Management should document that each worker has received the necessary training and is authorized to safely perform their assigned jobs
- Prior to loading a train, the entire work crew should meet to review the use of all applicable safety equipment, SOPs, responsibilities, assignments and communication methods
- Radios should be tested when removed from charging cradles by exchanging voice transmissions with all other radios
- Equipment operators must be instructed to halt train movement if communication is either lost, incomplete or unclear
- Someone must always be in a position to observe the leading end of railcar movement and relay signals to the equipment operator either continuously or at frequent intervals — the operator must always know the direction and distance remaining

Thank you for taking the time to review these recommendations. Understanding your sidetrack agreement and taking the right safety precautions will help keep your operation running smoothly and avoid potential liability.

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