

# ***FRA Grants “Relief” for Rail Carriers; Hell for Rail Workers***

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has issued a 60-day emergency waiver for certain requirements of FRA’s rail safety regulations, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The petitioners, on behalf of their member railroads, requested relief from certain requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations (49 CFR Parts 213, 214, 217, 218, 219, 220, 228, 229, 232, 234, 236, 239, 240, and 242). NOTE: The “relief” granted by the FRA applies to ALL rail companies in the United States.

Many of the regulations that you have worked under - in some cases for your entire career on the railroad - will no longer be enforced. This is a total game changer. Be prepared in the coming days and weeks to be ordered to perform any one of a number of unsafe tasks, that yesterday would've been a violation of federal law, yet today, failure to carry them out could result in termination!

Meantime, the FRA has so far refused to respond in such fashion to the rail unions petition, ignoring their pleas to – among other things – recall to service some of the thousands who have been laid off in recent months. Yet, while they remain in furlough status - complements of the carriers' scorched-earth business model of Precision Scheduled Railroading - the railroads are clamoring about "labor shortages" and are granted relief by the FRA! This reaches new depths of arrogance and tyranny, much less evil and immorality.

RWU will have more to say on this in the coming days, so please be on the lookout for more *Alerts* on this subject. There is a lot of technical information in the “Full Text of Emergency Waiver Letter” to cross-reference, digest and process. In lieu of that, the *Railway Age* article “FRA Issues Emergency Waiver” serves as an effective cliff-notes summary - enough to accurately qualify this as nothing less than an aggressive act-of-war against railroad workers and the public.

If ever there was an "All hands-on deck!" moment for railroad workers, this is it. We cannot sit back and allow the carriers and the government make us pay the price for their criminal lack of foresight and preparation in the face of this oncoming pandemic. There have been reports of health care workers on the front lines that have already paid the price with their health, due to lack of basic PPE, which should have been ordered in massive quantities two months ago - not last week. Similarly, furloughed railroad workers could have and should have been reintegrated back into the industry in that same time frame. There is time, of course, to still do this, yet as we write this, the railroad continues to furlough rail workers!

We need to educate ourselves and each other on the real-time implications and applications. We need to organize ourselves into a powerful force of resistance. Could it be time to consider all options on the table, regardless of whether they fit neatly into the carriers' and the government's proscribed terms of engagement?

We respectfully challenge, call upon, and plead with all of the rail unions' leadership to heed this desperate call for unity, solidarity and action. You have the resources, financial and otherwise - we have a dedicated army of activists ready and willing to work with you.

The rate of derailments, railroad worker fatalities, accidents and injuries was unacceptable before this FRA waiver went into effect. With the rail carriers now cut loose in the coming weeks to abrogate dozens, if not hundreds, of regulations in the name of “personnel shortages,” one shudders to think of the potential consequences. RWU demands that every politician forcefully denounce this charade for what it is, and demand that the Class One carriers recall to service their furloughed employees, rather than compromise the safety of rail workers and the public.

To our brothers and sisters working in the industry, as well as all of our friends and supporters, please share this far and wide with your co-workers, family, friends and other potential allies.