Freight Train Hits Watchman



A 59-year old worker was clearing snow from a rail station walkway when he was struck and killed by an approaching freight train.

The incident occurred at a commuter train station where the walkway crossed the tracks. There was no pedestrian warning system in place and it was the victim's assignment to watch for trains and warn crews and passengers of approaching trains.

On the day of the incident there was near-blizzard conditions and the crew were using snow blowers to clear the tracks. The victim, tired of standing in the cold, decided to start up another blower and help. He and a co-worker were standing between two sets of tracks and were unaware of an approaching freight train until just seconds before the engineer sounded the horn. Both men attempted to jump clear, but the victim was hit. It took the train almost a mile to stop. The victim was found dead in the snow next to the tracks.

The watchman's primary duty was to watch for trains and alert others to their arrival. In this case, the watchman's good intentions in helping to clear the tracks put his life and others' lives at risk. In the end it was he who paid the ultimate price. Workers must remember to put their safety first and to perform the duties outlined in their job descriptions.

Source: Massachusetts Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program, Case Report 03MA066