Take Advantage of ASLRRAs Many Educational Opportunities

Education, education, education. That word runs through so many of ASLRRAs posts and updates, it can be easy to overlook its importance. But staying stagnant has never helped anyone improve or innovate, and education is a key way to keep a business and its employees moving forward. That is why ASLRA makes educational opportunities a cornerstone of its mission, and why the Association offers a wide variety of ways for its members to continue learning.

Many of ASLRA’s educational resources are free for members, including most live and on-demand webinars. September and October alone offer several new webinars covering topics like automation and analytics, on-the-job training strategies, and railroad and utility crossing issues. See more information and register to attend these webinars in the ASLRA Webinars section below. Members who miss a webinar can watch it later by accessing ASLRA’s on-demand webinar library, which currently houses over 80 recordings.

Further exploration of the ASLRA website reveals a number of safety and compliance educational resources, such as training videos on post-accident toxicological testing and drug and alcohol testing guidelines.

ASLRA also uses its regional and annual meetings as an opportunity to provide a huge variety of informative sessions to participants. This year’s regional meetings offer hazardous materials training, information on disaster preparedness and crisis communications and presentations on other hot topics such as cyber security, CRISI grants and marijuana and CBD drug testing issues.

ASLRA’s largest gathering of the year, the Connections Convention, further builds upon the importance of education with even more opportunities to learn about the railroad industry and issues it faces, with nearly forty individual education breakout sessions plus general session presentations and panel discussions on emerging trends and industry challenges.

And, if that was not enough, ASLRA uses its social media platforms and weekly newsletter to keep members informed about the most recent happenings in the railroad industry, from changes in regulatory policy to advances on the legislative front.

Helping members stay atop the mountain of knowledge needed to run a railroad is one way ASLRA advocates for the short line railroad industry and its stakeholders. Whether online or in-person, ASLRA members have a number of opportunities to enhance their understanding of the short line railroad industry.
STB Members End Fuel Surcharge Debate Without Making a Decision

An inability to come to a majority decision has led the members of the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to discontinue proceedings on rail fuel surcharges and the “safe-harbor” provision.

The Aug. 28 decision brings an end to an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) issued in 2014 that sought input from stakeholders regarding whether the STB’s Highway Diesel Fuel (HDF) Index measure for rail fuel surcharges, also known as the safe-harbor provision, should be modified or eliminated.

The safe-harbor provision was implemented in 2007 as a way for railroads to use a designated index, the HDF Index, as a way to measure changes in fuel costs in order to implement a fuel surcharge program. The STB ruled that a carrier using the index to calculate charges could not be subject to a reasonableness challenge.

In 2013, the STB dismissed a complaint by shipper Cargill, Inc. that challenged fuel surcharges levied by BNSF Railway Company over a five-year period. The dismissal was based on the fact that BNSF had used the HDF Index as allowed, even though the board noted that BNSF’s fuel surcharge revenues greatly exceeded its incremental fuel costs. STB’s dismissal of Cargill’s challenge resulted in the now-discontinued 2014 ANPRM.

Each of the STB’s three members issued separate statements with the discontinuation notice, noting their varied opinions regarding the fuel surcharge issue and the safe-harbor provision and the desire to bring the issue to an administrative close rather than letting it linger unresolved.

Federal Railroad Administration Issues Stay of Regulations for System Safety Program Rule

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has issued a stay of regulations to a final rule requiring commuter and intercity passenger railroads to develop and implement a system safety program (SSP).

The FRA has stayed the SSP final rule’s requirements until Sept. 4, and will issue a final rule extending that stay until March 4, 2020.

The stay will allow the FRA to review comments on a notice of proposed rulemaking that suggested revisions to the original SSP final rule. The FRA is interested in addressing issues raised in petitions and comments before requiring compliance with the SSP final rule.
Minnesota Representative Emmer Visits Park Construction Company

On Aug. 22 Representative Tom Emmer (R-Minn.) visited Park Construction Company to tour the company’s Minneapolis, Minn. headquarters and equipment shop.

In addition to a tour, Emmer participated in a policy discussion with company leaders, local business and community officials, and rail industry representatives. In his comments about the visit, Emmer highlighted the importance of infrastructure investments to advancing economic growth.

Emmer is a co-sponsor of H.R. 510, the House bill that would make the 45G short line infrastructure investment tax credit permanent. All ten members of Minnesota’s delegation have signed on to their respective House or Senate bills in support of 45G permanency.

ASLRA Out and About

Members of ASLRA’s Young Professionals Committee Trained as Operation Lifesaver Volunteers
On August 28 and 29, members of ASLRA’s Young Professionals Committee from the Association and member companies Watco Rail and CDL Electric Company received training from Adrian Hertog to become official Operation Lifesaver Authorized Volunteers (OLAV).

The day-long face-to-face training session was the last step for the participants. Completing the program allows OLAVs to best educate the public on issues regarding Operation Lifesaver safety information.

Watco hosted the training session, which was held at the company’s corporate headquarters in Pittsburg, Kan.

Operation Lifesaver is a not-for-profit organization focused on providing education and awareness regarding safety at highway-rail crossings and on railroad tracks. The organization’s trained volunteers conduct free rail safety education programs for audiences in towns across the United States.

---

ASLRA Announcements

To further tell the short line story, ASLRA will profile some of its members who are noteworthy movers and shakers in the railroad industry. These railroads’ savvy decision-making and ingenuity make their business achievements worth sharing.

NLR’s Last-Mile Service Helps Keep a Local Minnesota Lumber Company Well Stocked with Raw Materials

An oft-repeated saying in the short line railroad industry highlights the niche role Class II and III railroads play in the American economy, as these small companies are responsible for the “first and last mile” when it comes to handling customer shipments. ASLRA member Northern Lines Railway (NLR) embodies this saying for customers like Renneberg Hardwoods, Inc., which receives lumber shipments from NLR at its St. Cloud, Minn. distribution center.

Approximately 150 boxcars move through Renneberg’s facility annually, bringing hardwood lumber and sheet goods from states like Montana and Oregon. The materials are shipped by rail, and NLR provides final-mile services to bring items directly to the 600-foot spur track on Renneberg’s property.

Technology helps NLR ensure timely deliveries, and Renneberg division manager Kelly May can easily follow the rail supply chain thanks to daily reports from NLR. With NLR employees able to spot arriving cars, Renneberg can then unload and release cars electronically in about 24 hours.
And when Minnesota’s infamously harsh winter weather hits? NLR is ready with a skid-steer loader and salt to clear Renneberg’s track and ensure minimal disruption to shipments.

The business relationship between NLR and Renneberg Hardwoods encapsulates so much of what often seems lost in today’s big box stores and global economy - a local business making products with raw materials sourced from only a few states over, brought in the last few miles by a short line railroad dedicated to ensuring reliable, routine deliveries. These are the old-fashioned values driving many of ASLRRA’s member railroads.

**It’s Not Too Late to Register for Next Week’s Central Pacific Region Meeting**

Even though ASLRRA’s Central Pacific Region Meeting in San Antonio is little more than a week away, there is still time to register for the Sept. 11-13 event.

Aside from general session discussions about positive train control, legislative and regulatory happenings and disaster preparedness, and breakout sessions covering cyber security, CRISI grants and drug testing, numerous networking opportunities allow the more than 200 registered attendees to make connections with other supplier members and railroad industry professionals.

Just added - the Small Railroad Committee will be meeting at the San Antonio regional meeting.

**Don’t Miss ASLRRA’s Eastern Region Meeting and Finance and Administration Seminar and General Counsel Symposium – Early Bird Registration Ends Tomorrow!**

The [Finance and Administration Seminar and General Counsel Symposium](#) will be held Oct. 9-11 in Columbus, Ohio, immediately following the Oct. 7-9 regional meeting at the same site.

Finance, human resources and legal professionals in the railroad industry are encouraged to attend the Finance and Administration Seminar and General Counsel Symposium, which will feature presentations from Railroad Retirement Board representatives as well as discussions on insurance, real estate and tax issues and many other topics.

The Eastern Region meeting itself includes presentations on disaster preparedness and response, a CSX update and sandhouse sessions offering participants networking opportunities. Attendees can also register for special events like the ASLRRA PAC reception or the Short Line Safety Institute safety train tour.

Early bird registration for the regional meeting, seminar and symposium closes Sept. 5. Follow the link above for more information or to register.
ASLRRRA Webinars

Leveraging Analytics and Automation for Effective Crew Management – Sept. 17, 2019
In this webinar, CloudMoyo’s Senior Railroad Consultant and Program Manager Shannon Bloxom will outline the challenges that crew managers face in their day-to-day jobs and look at how to automate processes for crew managers, streamlining their workflows as they leverage the power of crew analytics to drive efficiencies in crew management functions.

Effective On-the-Job Training Strategies – Oct. 2, 2019
In this webinar, Senior Railroad Consultant Ashok Madhavan of CloudMoyo will cover strategies that can make on-the-job training programs simple, effective, and compliant in today’s rail transportation industry.

Crossings: The Necessary Evil We Must Contend With – Oct. 23, 2019
Attorney Michael Barron of Fletcher and Sippel will focus on the risks and pitfalls of utility crossings and some tools railroads may have to deal with them. Barron will also discuss the current state and best practices of dealing with blocked crossing issues.

Click here for more ASLRRRA events.

Industry Events

Click here for a listing of industry events.

Views & News is published by American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association. Please contact Amy Krouse, editor, with questions or comments.