

Company News for MRL Employees

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2005
No. 50

2004 Review



Operating

by Mark Smith



Mark Smith
Terminal
Superintendent

The year began with new managers at the three major terminals on MRL. Shortly after the shift in managers, we experienced another change, which was mechanical, with the implementation of remote switches at Missoula and Laurel. It had a major impact on our injury and accident statistics, which were at zero wherever these switches were applied on the main switching leads at the respective terminals.

A long-time, noticeable pile of chrome disappeared from the right-of-way at Columbus. It took approximately three months and 1,520 cars to deliver the product to Minnesota, where it was loaded on ships and taken overseas. Great job by everyone involved in getting this task accomplished without incident! We also moved 1,660 cars of coal from Bull Mountain to various locations, with Lafarge at Chicago being the biggest customer with 1,114 cars. Our new customer, Thompson River Co-Gen at Thompson Falls, is in the process of getting underway and received 34 cars in 2004.

With the increase in traffic from the beginning of the year through October, many *1,000 Milers* were diverted to Livingston for inspection. It relieved congestion at Laurel allowing us to focus on switching priority merchandise trains. Livingston will continue to be considered a *relief valve* in the future.

Twenty switchmen qualified for Locomotive Engineer Training class which started mid-July. They should be qualified between late February and mid-June of 2005 depending on requirements met. Switchman interviews, which began in late December, will result in the hiring of 30 new switchmen that will be split equally between Laurel and Missoula. We look forward to starting the class in late January of 2005.

With the new and improved safety incentive program, aimed at reducing injuries and accidents alike, the operating department will be striving to meet the goals set forth so everyone can go home in the same physical shape in which they arrived.



Mechanical

by Jack Gabrian



Jack Gabrian
Superintendent of Cars

It was a very busy year for all Mechanical Department locations, including locomotive repair, which averaged 152 locomotives per month for a total of more than 1,800 for the year. They also serviced and fueled approximately 3,250 locomotives a month, which totaled approximately 39,000 units during the year.

On the railcar side, Missoula repaired a monthly average of 415 cars with Laurel averaging 1,180 cars per month. This equates to almost 1,600 cars repaired monthly with a yearly system-wide total of almost 19,200.

Apprentices were hired at most locations to maintain a required number of carmen. Laurel added seven carmen apprentices, while Livingston added three electrician apprentices and one machinist apprentice. Missoula's numbers increased by two carmen apprentices and one machinist apprentice. Welcome, all of the new Mechanical Department employees!

If the promise of more rail traffic holds true, the purchase and delivery of 16 new locomotives in 2005, and the addition of the new apprentices will enable the department to maintain a high level of service for the external and internal customers.

Engineering

by Randy Gustin



Randy Gustin
Assistant Chief Engineer

The Engineering Department was very busy maintaining and upgrading the MRL physical plant last year. To get this accomplished, there were as many as 104 extra people over and above the normal working force during the summer in the Track, Signal, and B&B areas.

The installation of 124,000 ties across the system was a highlight. Gangs 1953 and 1955 worked together to install 2,626 ties in a single day, establishing a new record on MRL. The previous record for ties installed in a single day was 2,536 in 1998.

Crews also installed 15 track miles of rail across the system and completed a million-dollar project to undercut over 16 miles of track between Helena and Blossburg. This results in better surface, drainage, and alignment in this area, and ensures longer life to ties, rail, and other components.

The Signal system was upgraded from ABS to CTC between Superior and Toole, including the elimination of semaphore signals and the pole line in this area.

B&B installed a new bridge at Arlee as part of a State Highway Project, replaced 771 ties on a bridge deck near Noxon, and repaired damage on the 5th subdivision in addition to the normal bridge projects that were done this year. A new garage was also constructed at Frenchtown for the Section Super Truck.

Promotions

Tom White ~ now Work Equipment Supervisor, Missoula from Machine Operator effective December 13, 2004

Look Who's New

Sharon Casey ~ Administrative Assistant to Superintendent, Laurel

Kurt Versland ~ Machinist, Livingston

Retirements

James Harris
Locomotive Engineer, Laurel

Jim began his railroad career in 1974 as a switchman/brakeman with the TP&W in East Peoria, IL. The TP&W merged with the ATSF in 1984. In 1988 Jim and his family moved to Laurel where he continued his railroad career with Montana Rail Link as a switchman. In 1996 Jim was promoted to Locomotive Engineer. Jim retired on December 31, 2004. Congratulations on your retirement!

Richard H. Smith
Locomotive Engineer, Missoula

Richard began his railroad career in 1957 as a switchman with the UP. He left the railroad in 1969, but returned in 1987 working for Montana Rail Link. Happy Retirement!

Operation Life Saver

Mark Siegler of the Livingston Roundhouse received the John Lewis Memorial Award from Sue Smith, President of the Montana Operation Lifesaver. Mark received the award for his outstanding contributions to Operation Lifesaver and his commitment to save lives by reducing grade crossing collisions.



Sue Smith and Mark Siegler

DATES TO REMEMBER

Daylight Savings
April 3rd

Memorial Day
May 30th

Missoula Golf Outing
June 25th

Senior Safety Council



The Senior Safety Council met last month to discuss numerous safety related topics including a review of all injuries and accidents, committee meetings, alternate exercises, SAFE Days, and 2005 safety awards. In addition, the \$100,000 committee fund was allocated to several projects. This fund is

by **Ted Hagemann** included in the annual budget for safety related projects submitted to the local safety committees across the railroad. Committee chairmen present each proposal to the council for approval by consensus of those present. This year there were a total of 49 requests submitted.

Requests approved by council include:

- More power switches in Laurel Yard.
- New garage or warehouse doors at Laurel and Paradise Depots.
- Paving projects in Missoula.
- Hose reels at Livingston and Big Timber.
- Air conditioning for several large trucks.
- Gloves for distribution by safety committees.
- Additional lighting at Laurel, Livingston, Trident, Belgrade and Missoula.

Since 1998 this fund has been used to complete many projects suggested by employees. Thank you to all employees for sharing your suggestions.

Watch local bulletin boards for complete Senior Safety Council meeting minutes.

More than a Coincidence . . .

by **Pete Lawrenson**

In 1997, Montana Rail Link employees experienced 40 reportable personal injuries. Followed by 1998 when MRL employees had 13 reportable personal injuries, and the company and its employees won the Harriman Gold Medal for outstanding safety performance.

In 2004, Montana Rail Link employees experienced 41 reportable injuries. Can 2005 repeat what was done in 1998, reducing injuries by almost 70% and making MRL a top contender for the Harriman Award?

The coincidence between the 1997/1998 and 2004/2005 injury rates enables all MRL employees to recognize and accept this challenge. To meet and beat the previous injury record of 13 injuries and a streak of 81 injury-free days in 2005 is easily within our grasp.

Let's all accept the challenge, accomplish the goals in small quarterly increments, be rewarded for our efforts, and most importantly, keep MRL employees safe and healthy!

↓ Tax Updates ↓

by **Patty Seabaugh**

The 2005 New Year brings great news! The government has reduced the employee Tier II tax rate. That's right ~ reduced from 4.9% to 4.40%, effective January 1.

In addition, the mileage rate will increase from \$037.5 to \$040.5.

What great news to begin the New Year!

Grant-in-Aid Funds Increase

by **Lynda Frost**

Financial assistance toward higher education of family members of employees continues to be available under the Washington Companies' Grant-in-Aid Program. A recent communiqué from the Foundation announced the funds available to individuals are now double that of previous years, and more types of schools qualify. Under the new program, the children or spouse of an eligible employee may each receive up to \$1,000 per year (up to \$3,000 lifetime) toward expenses at an accredited university, college, community college, vocational technical school or trade school.

Eligibility requirements, deadlines and other specific rules apply, so peruse the application form at

<http://intranet.washcorp.com/grantaid> or call Robin Anderson at (406) 523-1320

The funds are made available by Montana Rail Link through its contribution to the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation. Yet another great benefit of being a Washington Company employee.

Dispatch is the employee "communiqué" that replaces the MRL newsletter.

You can access the Dispatch on the internet at www.mrl.com