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## Safety Culture Assessments Completed on Short Line Railroads Show Clear Industry Strengths

*Annual analysis of completed Assessments drives development of new resources for railroads*

WASHINGTON – July 25, 2024 – The [Short Line Safety Institute](http://www.shortlinesafety.org) (SLSI) has released a Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) research [results paper](#) analyzing the twenty Safety Culture Assessments (SCAs) conducted on short line railroads in 2023, identifying five areas of strength across the railroads, and five areas of opportunity.

“Our process for measuring safety culture is the most [comprehensive and robust](#) in the railroad industry. On an annual basis, we review our body of work – more than 150 SCAs to date - and document industry trends,” said Sam Cotton, Director of Safety Culture Programs, SLSI. “We celebrate the safety culture strengths that are noted across the industry, and develop programs and resources to address emerging opportunities for improvement.”

A frequency analysis identified the following areas of strength, listed in prevalence order:

- *Provision of PPE*: Railroads provide PPE to employees as needed and it is readily available.

- *Approaching Management with Safety Concerns*: Employees feel comfortable communicating safety related issues/concerns.
- *Helping Coworkers*: Employees are willing to assist each other in understanding and performing safety-related work tasks.
- *Safety Communication Quality/Quantity*: Bulletins and alerts are used as a learning opportunity on how to prevent safety incidents.
- *Leadership/Management Field Presence*: There is an adequate presence of management members in the field.

Opportunities for improvement included:

- *System for Reporting Safety Concerns/Resolutions*: Some railroads could improve their systems for reporting and tracking employee concerns and resolutions to these concerns.
- *Recognition of Safe Work Practices*: Some employees express a desire for more recognition (beyond awards) and reinforcement in the field for engaging in safe work practices.
- *Safe Work Practices*: There is a perception at some railroads that work practices may allow unsafe behaviors in order to get the job done faster.
- *Orderly Workplace*: The organization or maintenance of the property at some railroads could be improved.
- *Safety Action Plan*: Some railroads could create a safety action plan that is well communicated.

“Just as short line railroads seek to continuously improve their Safety Culture, the SLSI seeks to continuously improve our service to the industry,” said Tom Murta, Executive Director, SLSI. “Opportunities for improvement across the industry identified during the annual review process have led to the development of successful programs such as our [Leading Forward](#) class, a robust library of Safety Tips and Videos for use in safety briefings, Hazardous Materials Training for railroads and first responders, and a new program we are

piloting that will assist railroads in solving problems with a structured approach. This year's review will lead to several actions, including reviewing best practices for recognizing safe work practices in the field as part of our [Leading Forward](#) class, and printed resources that we can provide during the closeout meeting such as [templates](#) for Safety Action Plans, and a [tracker](#) for reporting and resolving safety concerns."

An [SCA](#) is conducted onsite by a team of SLSI professionals and combines an online employee survey, onsite employee interviews, safety documents reviews, and field observations.

At the conclusion of the SCA, railroad management will receive an in-depth evaluation of performance on their railroad, reviewed using the Ten Core Elements of a Strong Safety Culture, as adopted by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Safety Council. In addition, the SLSI team will provide resources and tools to address areas of opportunity on the railroad.

An SCA is voluntary, non-punitive, confidential, and free of charge to short line, passenger, tourist, and commuter railroads. To schedule, contact [slsi@shortlinesafety.org](mailto:slsi@shortlinesafety.org).

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About SLSI - The Short Line Safety Institute (SLSI) is a non-profit corporation that conducts Safety Culture Assessments, provides Hazardous Material Instructor and Leadership Development programs, and is the educational, training and research source for short line and regional railroads concerning safety culture. [www.shortlinesafety.org](http://www.shortlinesafety.org), [@shortlinesafety](#), [LinkedIn](#)