

National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration

**Ames Research Center**  
Moffett Field, CA 94035-1000



## C<sup>3</sup>RS Alert Message Memo

The Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C<sup>3</sup>RS) is a partnership between the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in conjunction with participating railroad carriers and labor organizations. The program is designed to improve railroad safety by collecting and analyzing reports which describe unsafe conditions and events in the railroad industry. Employees are encouraged to report safety issues or "close calls" voluntarily and confidentially.

When C<sup>3</sup>RS receives a report(s) describing a hazardous situation - for example, a railroad system problem, a confusing procedure, or any other circumstance that might compromise safe operations - it will issue an Alert Message. Alert Messages have a single purpose: to relay safety information to individuals in a position of authority so that they can evaluate the safety information and take corrective action as needed. C<sup>3</sup>RS has no direct operational authority of its own. It acts through, and with, the cooperation of others. Alert Messages are classified as Alert Bulletins or For Your Information Notices and may be included in ad hoc C<sup>3</sup>RS Safety Teleconferences.

**Alert Bulletins** – Alert Bulletins (ABs) are utilized for significant or time-critical safety Issues.

**For Your Information Notices** – For less critical topics, For Your Information (FYI) Notices are issued.

**Safety Teleconferences** – C<sup>3</sup>RS will conduct Safety Teleconferences on an ad hoc basis between C<sup>3</sup>RS and others within the railroad community. These teleconferences alert appropriate personnel to safety issues identified in some selected C<sup>3</sup>RS Alert Messages by engaging in dialogue about the event(s) presented.

All Alert Messages are issued using de-identified information provided in the reports.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Becky L. Hooey".

Becky L. Hooey, Director  
NASA Confidential Close Call Reporting System  
NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System  
Email: [Becky.L.Hooey@nasa.gov](mailto:Becky.L.Hooey@nasa.gov)  
Phone: 408.541.2854

## About C<sup>3</sup>RS Reports & Alert Messages

### C<sup>3</sup>RS Report Records

The C<sup>3</sup>RS Expert Analysts provide the analysis for each report record in the C<sup>3</sup>RS Database. Information in a C<sup>3</sup>RS report record includes two types of information – fixed and text.

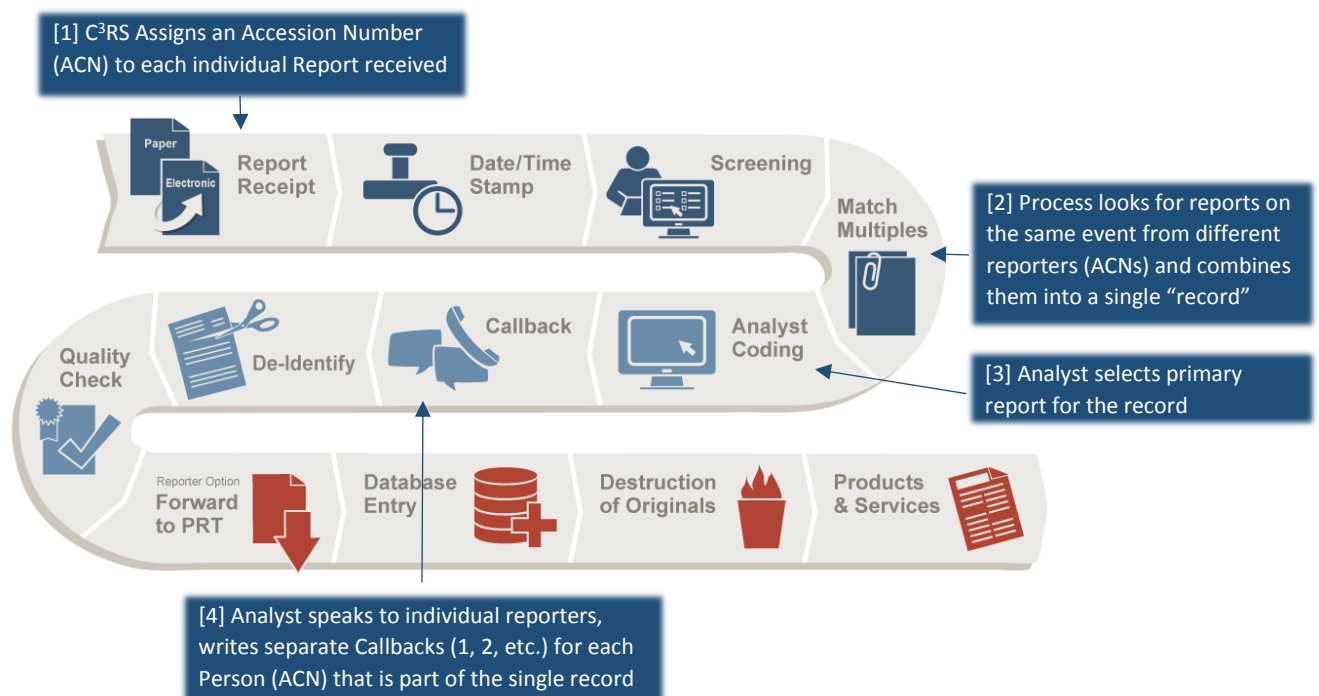
- **Fixed** fields contain information such as Types of Track Authority, Method of Operations, Speed Restrictions, etc.
- **Text** fields include the reporter's Narrative, Callback and Expert Analyst Synopsis.

### Multiple Reports

One of the great strengths of C<sup>3</sup>RS is the ability to combine information from multiple reports on the same event that provides each person's unique perspective, experience, background and knowledge. In a hypothetical example, a train arrives at a station with one or more of the cars off the platform and one of the crew opens the door. Reports may be received from the Engineer, the Conductor, and the Assistant Conductor; all who have been involved in or observed the event. In this example, C<sup>3</sup>RS could have three reports that describe the same incident. All reports are combined into a single database record. Each person who reported is coded in the report record by reference number (PERSON 1, 2, etc.). Every report to C<sup>3</sup>RS receives a unique Accession Number (ACN). Each person's narrative is entered as NARRATIVE 1, 2, etc. The C<sup>3</sup>RS Expert Analysts may perform a telephone Callback to clarify or confirm information. A summary of the Callback is written by the analysts and included in the CALLBACK 1, 2, etc. section of the report record.

### Alert Messages (Alert Bulletin & FYI Notices)

The ACN number presented on the Alert Message is the primary ACN in the single or multiple report record. Each Alert Message includes a front-page introduction and relevant report records. See the graphic below for a summary of the matching and C<sup>3</sup>RS report record processing steps.



# ALERT BULLETIN

AB 2019 1/2-1

4/04/2019

15360, 15318, 15293, 15045

TO: FRA-RRS

INFO: FRA-RCC, PRT, AAR, APTA, ARASA, ASLRRA, ATDA, BLET, BMWED, BRS, IAMAW, IBEW, NRC, NTSB, NYA, SLSI, SMART, TCU, VOLPE

FROM: Becky L Hooey, Director  
NASA Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C<sup>3</sup>RS)

SUBJ: BLUE FLAG PROTECTION

We recently received C<sup>3</sup>RS reports describing a safety concern that may involve your area of operational responsibility. We do not have sufficient details to assess either the factual accuracy or possible gravity of the report. It is our policy to relay the reported information to the appropriate authority for evaluation and any necessary follow-up. We feel you should be aware of the following:

C<sup>3</sup>RS has received multiple reports regarding the application of Blue Flag Protection. The following reports illustrate the concern.

(ACN 15360) A Conductor reported Mechanical Forces did not follow procedure and left a Blue Flag on a track in the yard after releasing it to the Yardmaster.

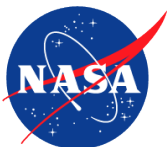
(ACN 15318) A Laborer working under a locomotive in a shop reported that Blue Flag Protection was released without notification.

(ACN 15293) Mechanical forces reported that a Train Crew tied onto and moved equipment which was still under Blue Flag Protection while Laborers were on the train.

(ACN 15045) A Laborer did not call the Yardmaster for Blue Flag Protection while training a coworker on how to service the train car.

Keywords: Protection, Blue Flag

To properly assess the usefulness of our alert message service, we would appreciate it if you would take the time to give us your feedback on the value of the information that we have provided. Please contact Becky Hooey at (408) 541-2854 or email at [Becky.L.Hooey@nasa.gov](mailto:Becky.L.Hooey@nasa.gov)



Confidential Close Call Reporting System  
P.O. Box 177 | Moffett Field, CA | 94035-0177



## ACN 15360

### DATE / TIME

Date of Occurrence	2019-03
Local Time Of Day	0601 - 1200

### ENVIRONMENT

Weather	Clear
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### TRAIN / EQUIPMENT A

Operation Type	Yard Assignment
Train / Equipment Location	Yard
Methods Of Operation	Yard Limits
Methods Of Operation	Other Than Main Track Rules
Train Activity at Time of Event	Switching In Yard
Temporary Speed Restriction Involved	Verbal Permission

### PERSON 1

Accession Number	15360
Function	Conductor

### EVENTS

Anomaly	Encounter - Protection
Anomaly	On Track Protection Deviation - Manual Protection
Anomaly	Procedural Deviation - Operations Policy
Anomaly	Procedural Deviation - Mechanical Regulations
Detected by Person	Train Crew
General Result	Requested Assistance / Clarification

### NARRATIVE 1

We were taking 3 cars off Track X for Track Y. We did an air test and tested the hand brakes and made a separation, when we noticed the track had a Blue Flag displayed. We called the Yardmaster and the flag was taken down.

### CALLBACK 1

The reporter, a Conductor, stated that they received orders from the Yardmaster to go to Track X, and begin their work. When they arrived, there was not any Blue Flag protection on the cars or the locomotive. When they separated the cars and asked for permission out of Track X, the Yardmaster stated that there was a Blue Flag on the track and they would send someone out to remove it. The Conductor stated that no one was working on the track when they were and someone had just forgotten to remove the Blue Flag prior to releasing the track.

### SYNOPSIS

A Conductor reported Mechanical Forces did not follow procedure and left a Blue Flag on a track in the yard after releasing it to the Yardmaster.

## ACN 15318

### DATE / TIME

Date of Occurrence	2019-02
Local Time Of Day	1201 - 1800

### ENVIRONMENT

Weather	Clear
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### TRAIN / EQUIPMENT A

Train / Equipment Location	Repair Facility
Temporary Speed Restriction Involved	Verbal Permission

### COMPONENT 1

Track Component	Derail
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### PERSON 1

Accession Number	15318
Function	Laborer
Callback	Attempted

### EVENTS

Anomaly	On Track Protection Deviation - Manual Protection
Anomaly	On Track Protection Deviation - Track Occupancy
Anomaly	Procedural Deviation - Operations Policy
Anomaly	Procedural Deviation - Mechanical Regulations
Anomaly	Safety Concern
Detected by Person	Mechanical
General Result	Requested Assistance / Clarification

### NARRATIVE 1

I was working in/under a locomotive (inoperable) on a Blue Flag and derail protected interior shop track. Standard procedure is supposed to be that all personnel working within the track are notified, so they can vacate before the derail is open and equipment moved. I look up and see the Blue Flag blinking indicating an open derail and equipment moving on the track. I cleared the project and asked [a] nearby Laborer, if anyone [was] notified [that] the derail was being opened. The Laborer said our Supervisor and current Engineer running the locomotive and derelict locomotive into the shop simply yelled that the derail is open. From the opposite end of the shop, which is where other personnel were working [it] is extremely difficult to hear. Apparently, they didn't hear it either since they were oblivious to what was going on as well.

### SYNOPSIS

A Laborer working under a locomotive in a shop reported that Blue Flag Protection was released without notification.

**DATE / TIME**

Date of Occurrence	2019-02
Local Time Of Day	1201 - 1800

**ENVIRONMENT**

Weather	Clear
Weather	Ice
Weather	Snow
Weather	Wind

**TRAIN / EQUIPMENT A**

Operation Type	Passenger / Commuter
Train / Equipment Location	Yard
Train Activity at Time of Event	Switching In Yard

**PERSON 1**

Accession Number	15293
Function	Carman

**PERSON 2**

Accession Number	15347
Function	Carman

**PERSON 3**

Accession Number	15294
Function	Carman

**EVENTS**

Anomaly	On Track Protection Deviation - Manual Protection
Anomaly	Procedural Deviation - Operations Policy
Anomaly	Procedural Deviation - Mechanical Regulations
Anomaly	Safety Concern
Detected by Person	Mechanical
General Result	No Action Taken

**NARRATIVE 1**

While I was standing with the wheel change crew, the yard Conductor and Engineer connected the switch locomotive onto the consist. I heard two Laborers yell out that they were on board and had their Blue Flag Protection up. [I] immediately radioed to the Conductor "hold up".

I proceeded to cross through the train and while in the vestibule, I radioed [the] Conductor again to "hold up", after which the Conductor saw me crossing through; at which point, in a hurry to verbalize the emergency to the Conductor, I am not sure if I exited the train with proper protection. Then I informed the Conductor that people were on board. At this point, the Laborers stuck their heads out of the train where we were at and were talking to us, saying that they had their tags up, so I went to the Blue Flag that was laying on the ground and their tags were there. I heard the Conductor tell the Laborers that the yard Flagman told them that [the] track was open and ready for a re-spot; that it wasn't their fault. Then, the Conductor asked them if he could re-spot the train for the next wheel change, at which time both Laborers agreed that it was OK. Then the Conductor proceeded to move the train with both Laborers on board. I told [the] Conductor that this is a mistake to move the train with the Laborers on board. [The] Conductor proceeded to re-spot the train with

the Laborers on board and pulled off the consist. They re-locked the track and changed the wheel. No injuries were sustained that I have been made aware of.

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## **NARRATIVE 2**

We were working on wheels all day and when we were done, a coworker in our group had dropped our Blue Flag tags. When they did that, they dropped the Laborers tags on accident and we didn't know they were on the car because there was no power on the cars and lights were off and we are not supposed to work on dark cars. Usually no one is servicing the cars when [we] do wheels on that track. When the crew came to tie on, the Laborers popped out of the car asking who dropped their tags, but we were not sure. The Train Crew had talked to them and everyone was OK and they ended up moving the car after the incident.

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## **NARRATIVE 3**

After replacing wheels, and [with] employees working on and around the equipment, [and when they] were done with their work, I was instructed to remove Blue Flag tags. I removed the tags and dropped the Blue Flag, not knowing a Laborer was servicing the car. After removing the tags and flags, Transportation came to re-spot the cars while the Laborer was still [in a] car, which was the violation. I think cold weather and heavy workload played a part in the incident and I think that everyone being more aware and not as stressed can prevent [a] recurrence.

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Mechanical forces reported that a Train Crew tied onto and moved equipment which was still under Blue Flag Protection while Laborers were on the train.

## ACN 15045

### DATE / TIME

Date of Occurrence 2019-02  
Local Time Of Day 1801 - 2400

### ENVIRONMENT

Weather Clear

### TRAIN / EQUIPMENT A

Operation Type Passenger / Commuter  
Train / Equipment Location Yard  
Train / Equipment Location Adjacent To Track  
Methods Of Operation Other Than Main Track Rules  
Train Activity at Time of Event Held

### PERSON 1

Accession Number 15045  
Function Laborer

### EVENTS

Anomaly On Track Protection Deviation - Manual Protection  
Anomaly Procedural Deviation - Operations Policy  
Anomaly Procedural Deviation - Mechanical Regulations  
Detected by Person Mechanical  
General Result No Action Taken

### NARRATIVE 1

While I was training another coworker and explaining how to service the train, I forgot to place a safety hold on the equipment I was preparing to service. I did all the correct things to begin service, putting my tags on both engineer cabs, but I got distracted in my attempt to show how to perform the duties of servicing the train car. I didn't realize that I had started servicing the train and didn't call the Yardmaster over the radio for track protection.

### CALLBACK 1

The reporter, a Laborer, stated that having a coworker shadowing became a distraction. While explaining the job and watching out for the coworker's safety, the Laborer did not contact the Yardmaster for protection before servicing a train. The Laborer did contact the Yardmaster after the event to let them know of the situation and that they were now clear. The Laborer also stated that in the future, concentrating on the task at hand before trying to explain the process to a coworker or trainee would be helpful.

### SYNOPSIS

A Laborer did not call the Yardmaster for Blue Flag Protection while training a coworker on how to service the train car.