

Developing Good Housekeeping Habits Among Track Employees

Report of Committee

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Housekeeping as defined by Webster is "the management or control of household affairs." Applied to railroads, it could be further defined as the economical management of properties by the planned use of men, monies and materials to insure full value for every dollar expended.

Now it is natural to ask the following questions: What is good housekeeping? Why have good housekeeping? When should it be practiced? What relationship does good housekeeping have to good track? What effect does it have on the morale of our customers - our employees? Finally, how can it be developed?

The Tool House

The first step in the day's work begins at the tool house. Management should provide adequate tool houses, where tools can be kept in their proper places, in bins and racks, so they are readily available and so every man in the gang will know their location. Motor cars and push cars must be kept clean, properly lubricated, and so maintained as to prevent the possibility of breakdowns. This applies also to power tools, especially those which are interchanged with other sections. All machines should be kept clean and in good working condition, and operators should be given time to see that this is done. Here substantial returns are received from the practice of good housekeeping, for a clean machine can be easily and quickly inspected and small defects found and corrected before they cause serious damage. These are tangible results of good housekeeping that can be calculated in terms of real money.

To cut down the possibility of fires at tool houses, underground gasoline storage tanks equipped with suction, or force, pumps are usually provided. This should be a requirement on all railroads, Oil drums are usually placed on racks, and under them a drip pan, filled with sand, is located so as to catch drippings. Safety cans for filling motor cars with gasoline are a must. All of these things should be provided by our railroads. It is up to us as supervisors to see that they are used and that tool houses are kept clean, neat and in an orderly manner. This is not a task to be given to one man once a week, but must be handled daily, with all members of the gang participating.

Materials at section headquarters should be piled neatly, with the small material in proper bins. A material platform made of concrete, asphalt pavement, or secondhand stringers or ties, is necessary to provide a proper bearing for the larger items. If the materials for a platform are not available a leveled-off spot covered with gravel, screenings or cinders will suffice. With such a platform the foreman has the opportunity to get his material together, thus eliminating the possibility of its becoming lost or misplaced. Materials that are so placed can be readily inventoried and over-supplies can be quickly detected. With the high cost of materials today, stocks must necessarily be kept to the minimum, and there is no better way to do this than to keep the materials at designated locations.

Standards Vary

The standard of housekeeping necessarily varies with the degree of importance of the track. What might be considered as acceptable on a light-traffic branch line would not be tolerated on a high-speed main line. General rules are applicable to all locations, but it is up to the supervisor to see that his gangs are not spending time and

money unnecessarily. Each spot must be judged on its own merits. A job on the track, whether it be main line or branch, is not complete until the ties, scrap and other material are picked up, ballast is replaced in the track, and the last small detail taken care of.

How much better a job is when the small details are attended to, and a few minutes are devoted each day to cleaning up, than when old ties and released materials are left scattered around for someone to fall over, ballast is not replaced in the cribs, and tools are left out over night. Leave a sloppy job and it is likely to remain sloppy. As a result, criticism is invited. A job that looks good will usually be a good job, for if the men take enough pride in their work to see that the track is cleaned up, they will also take pride in the quality of their work, seeing that all details, no matter how small, are attended to. The final result is always good track.

Why Good Housekeeping?

Why have good housekeeping? This probably can be answered best by saying that with it you have safety first. Without it you have a condition which can only result in personal injuries, fire losses, and an indifferent attitude on the part of employees toward their work. With good housekeeping comes good track, which, after all, is the one thing we are all striving for.

Materials that are allowed to lay around constitute a very definite hazard to trainmen, as well as to our own men. Materials which are improperly piled and cared for result in many personal injuries. The number of personal injuries sustained by railroad men falling over material, scrap and rocks in toe paths and runways, and because of uneven ground conditions, is astounding. Such injuries are particularly prevalent in heavy-switching yards, where yardmen are constantly getting on and off moving engines and cars. The railroads are spending huge sums of money daily to overcome poor footing conditions, and it is known to all of us that where these conditions are corrected, the accident ratio for this type of injury drops very rapidly.

This all leads back to the trackmen. If good housekeeping habits are developed by them, these conditions can be materially improved. Yards must, of course, be given special attention. Where necessary, machines, such as end-loaders, power shovels, cranes and trucks should be used to assist yard cleaners in keeping walkways and toe paths clean.

Weed Control

With the increased cost of labor, the pulling and cutting of weeds by hand must, of necessity, be kept to the absolute minimum. The use of chemicals for the treatment of the roadbed is expanding, and proper machines, such as weed mowers, weed burners, flame throwers, kerosene torches and butane torches, should be used wherever possible. If these tools and chemicals are to be used efficiently, a program must be set up so as to minimize the use of hand labor.

The removal of weeds and grasses is important not only from the standpoint of making good-appearing track and of reducing fire hazards, but, most important of all, to improve drainage. We maintenance men know that the provision and maintenance of good drainage in roadbeds is of the utmost importance to good, safe track. Savings made by good drainage can be computed in dollars and cents. Fires which originate along the track as a result of dry grass, with possible large losses to railroad and adjoining property, quickly reflect the importance of a well devised plan for weed control. Weeds in the ballast are a thorn in the side of the track man, and he will utilize every means available to remove them, for he is well aware of the fact that it costs more to maintain track which is fouled with weeds.

An Every-Day Job

There is no "closed season" on good housekeeping. It is a duty to be performed, and, with repetition, good housekeeping habits become a part of the daily routine, not only on the job, but personally as well. Some foremen set apart one day for clean up; others use parts of certain days. We know that the best results are obtained when good housekeeping is practiced daily. A good housekeeper does not clean up once in awhile. He stays at this job, keeping on top of all conditions which tend to give his railroad a ragged appearance.

Good housekeeping and good track go together. It is difficult to draw the line between them. However, good housekeeping is carried to the point where a gang becomes more interested in maintaining a good ballast line than good track line, in keeping a uniform ballast section instead of uniform surface, in picking weeds out of the ballast rather than picking up low joints, then it becomes a wasteful practice and false economy.

Housekeeping must be kept in balance and not carried to extremes. Neatness is essential to good work, and is the outward sign of a straight-thinking mind. One who practices neatness in his work and about his person will naturally turn out good work. He will see that all of the small details of a given job are completed in a workmanlike manner, for he will not be satisfied with anything but the best.

Effect On Patrons

The effect that a properly maintained railroad has on our customers is important. Given a choice of two roads, assuming, of course, that each could and would handle his business in about the same time, it is natural to believe that the shipper will pick the one which looks the best-the neatest-for he can be sure that this road will make the best effort toward giving him the service that he wants, and that his goods or products will arrive in the best condition.

Our patrons on the passenger trains are quick to comment on the good housekeeping of our properties -or lack of it-so we should all endeavor to keep them looking in the best possible condition. The morale of employees on a well-maintained railroad is always higher than that of employees on a road that looks on good housekeeping with indifference. They take pride in working for such a company, and their safety habits are at a higher level. Thus, the danger of personal injuries is lessened, better work is done, and increased production is accepted as normal.

Foreman Must Lead

The development of good housekeeping habits must begin with the man who does the work - the track man. Each man has his own idea of what constitutes good housekeeping. Therefore, the foreman necessarily becomes the teacher, so that all of his men will be thinking and acting along the same line, to the end that he will have a uniform condition, and not six or eight conditions-all different. The foreman must see that his men understand just what is wanted and why. By taking his men into his confidence and explaining the whys and wherefores of good housekeeping, he will give them a feeling that they are a part of the great team that keeps the wheels rolling.

Roadmasters and supervisors have a very definite responsibility in maintaining good housekeeping, for it is the rule, rather than the exception, that the appearance of their districts will quickly reflect their interest in this matter. They must set a goal and see that every man under their supervision becomes familiar with that goal and works toward it.

Management, too, must want good housekeeping before the idea can ever be sold to the employee. Many ideas are used to encourage good housekeeping, such as annual inspections, awards for best sections, medals or scrolls, etc., for neatness. These are all very helpful. But probably the best, and incidentally the cheapest, encouragement is a word or a letter from a supervisor or other officer complimenting a man upon his efforts, the appearance of his section or district, or even singling out one particular job for praise. Roadmasters, supervisors and foremen can gain much by riding over other districts. Actually seeing what the other fellow is doing will create much interest, and develop in men the desire to better their own sections. Management should encourage this practice, which will develop the competitive spirit in the organization and tend to bring about uniformly better conditions.

The conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing facts is that good housekeeping habits are essential to efficient railroad operation and maintenance. The extent to which these habits should be developed depends entirely upon their economic value to each railroad. Extremes in either direction are equally wasteful, and can neither be warranted nor condoned.

The maintenance departments of all railroads are now faced with the 40-hour week, which is reducing the working time 16% per cent. With time and effort being so reduced, it is incumbent upon all of us to evaluate to a greater extent than ever before the benefits to be derived from good housekeeping habits.

DISCUSSION

President Fox: You have done a good job in presenting that report, but Mr. Neal wrote me to say that he had a good assistant. Any discussion, gentlemen? It is getting late but we have time for some discussion.

T. H. Nelson (Son. Pac.): The committee has covered this subject very well, and I only wish to remark that I am glad they brought out the point that good housekeeping can be carried to extremes, such as pulling weeds out of the ballast. It becomes a wasteful practice and false economy when carried to extremes. I realize now, with the 40-hour week and the small track forces, that it becomes the duty of the roadmaster to see that the track men don't do any unnecessary tasks. However, I believe that housekeeping can be maintained if we instruct our gangs to take care of this necessary cleaning up, such as piling material and taking care of their tools, and not letting it go until it becomes a major problem. But, if we keep after the track gangs and impress upon them the importance of this daily work while it is still a minor job, and not let it go until it becomes a major problem, I believe we will still maintain good housekeeping.

W. J. Jones (Sou. Pac.): Mr. Nelson brought out two facts that impressed me in this article, namely, that this is a job which has to start at the tool house, and that it is an every-day task. I was impressed with the pictures we saw, but I would like some information. On the door of that tool house was a placard entitled "Good Housekeeping." Several times I tried to read those three lines that were printed on that placard, but I wasn't able to make them out. Would one of the I.C. men be good enough to tell us what they said? It appeared to me that there was the best place to impress upon the section foreman that it would be his duty to maintain good housekeeping on his railroad. If he is reminded of that constantly, half of your problem is licked in developing good housekeeping habits.

A practice that is used for today but is not continued, is not a practice. I believe that we officers are prone to get excited about something when it is called to our attention. But, the instant that our superiors fail to continue calling things to our attention, we get neglectful and turn our attention to something that just came in the morning's mail. So, I think that starting at the tool house is where we must impress upon the foreman that he should start his good housekeeping there for that day.

President Fox: Any Illinois Central man here who can tell us about that sign? Well, we will see Neal Howard and he will get you one. We will now stand adjourned until tomorrow morning.

. . . The meeting adjourned at 4:30 o'clock.

