

Two New York City transit workers killed in less than a week

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In the space of less than a week, two New York City subway workers lost their lives in on-the-job accidents and a third was seriously injured.

Daniel Boggs, 42, a veteran track worker, was killed on Tuesday, April 24, at about 11:20 p.m. Boggs, who was married and a father of three young children, was setting up lanterns (to warn trains to slow down due to work in the area) near the 59th Street-Columbus station in Manhattan, when he was fatally struck by a No. 3 downtown express train. He and his crewmates apparently believed that the last No. 3 train had passed after seeing a work train go through, and that it was now safe to resume work on the track.

What they did not know was that a local No.3 was stalled with brake problems, and the train behind it was diverted to the express track. Tower personnel, who are authorized to change trains from one track to another, obviously did not know that there were employees who had already begun work on the express track. The train operator on the No. 3 train was moving too fast to stop in time to avoid hitting Boggs.

The second incident took place on Sunday, April 30, and involved another veteran worker. Marvin Franklin, 55, a painter with 22 years working in the transit system, was killed instantly when a Queens-bound G train struck and killed him, while injuring his partner, Jeffrey Hill, 37. Hill, a transit worker since 2005, was rushed to Bellevue Hospital, where he was reported to be in critical condition. The two men were moving a dolly on the tracks adjacent to the Hoyt-Schermerhorn station in Brooklyn in preparation for a major renovation project.

The G train was coming around a sharp curve, and it appears that the train operator's view was blocked by the station platform. When he was able to see the men who were placing the dolly on the station platform, the

train operator, despite his best effort, was not able to stop in time. Both workers were pinned and partially crushed by the train. Franklin was apparently dragged a distance equivalent to one half the length of the station platform. There was no signal protection for the two men that would have warned the train operator to slow down and beep his horn in order to avoid a collision with any personnel on the track.

After the second incident, the city's Transit Authority (TA) suspended all construction and track projects for at least 48 hours and ordered all of its 6,000 employees engaged in this type of work to attend a safety refresher course. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) local 100, representing about 34,000 subway and bus workers, has been working to help the TA design a 60-page book for this emergency course.

Transit workers charged that the back-to-back tragedies exposed the chronic lack of safety for those who must walk and work on the tracks. Many have demanded that the TA provide them with radios to be able to communicate with the tower and moving trains. Had they been issued such devices, workers insist, Boggs and Franklin would not have been killed.

"This is basically all we have out there when we go out—a helmet, gloves and a vest," transit worker Robert Yard told the media. "I carry a flashlight when I go. All track workers have a flashlight, but that's the only protection we have out there. On occasion, we have dust masks for situations where we work at, but this is not going to stop a train from doing damage to you."

In the wake of the latest deaths on the tracks, many track workers have spoken of the close calls nearly all of them have experienced. Indeed, it is hard to find a veteran transit worker who works on the tracks who doesn't have what is referred to as a "war story"—an incident where only quick action prevented death or

serious injury.

The workers have also bitterly complained about supervisors who attempt to get more work done with less manpower, pressuring employees to take shortcuts. In addition, the modern trains are less noisy than the older ones used to be and therefore harder to detect when approaching a work crew.

According to the union, 27 subway workers have been killed in the performance of their duties since 1980, and according to the TA, there have been 81 accidental fatalities since the mid-1940s.

According to the TA, there were 924 non-fatal “employee accidents” in 2000 and 502 in 2006. These statistics do not differentiate between incidents in which only one worker was injured and those involving multiple injuries.

These numbers also do not include cases in which the TA has challenged an employee complaint of an on-the-job injury. Indeed, transit workers are convinced that the improved employee accident numbers reported by the TA over the last six years do not reflect improved safety, but rather a very conscious and aggressive agency policy to deny injured workers what they are due under the state compensation system in order to save money for the authority.



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