

# Remembering brother Chris Seeling: FRA final rule requires emergency escape breathing apparatuses

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On January 25, 2024, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced a [final rule](#) requiring railroads to provide emergency escape breathing apparatuses to train crew members who work on hazardous materials trains. The [FRA press release](#) announcing the final rule states that the rule was advanced after the Norfolk Southern derailment in East Palestine, which occurred in 2023.

The fact of the matter is the rule dates to 2005 when a similar derailment and toxic chemical spill happened in Graniteville, S.C. On January 6, 2005, a Norfolk Southern train derailed and released a cloud of chlorine gas. The town

was evacuated, but not before nine people were killed and another 250 were injured.

Among the dead was BLET locomotive engineer Christopher G. Seeling, who was Secretary-Treasurer of BLET Division 85 (Columbia, S.C.). Brother Seeling was only 28 years old. He didn't die from injuries sustained in the crash. Rather, he was overcome by chlorine gas exposure after carrying his unconscious conductor to safety.

Three years after the Graniteville catastrophe, the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 was signed into law. It mandated that railroads provide emergency escape breathing apparatuses to keep train crews safe. The law was based in part on National Transportation Safety Board recommendations following its Graniteville investigation.

While the BLET is grateful for the safety improvements provided by this final rule, it is unacceptable that it has taken 19 years after the Graniteville tragedy for it to happen. Had he survived, Brother Seeling would have been 47 years old this year.

This final rule is effective March 26, 2024.

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