



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
Pipeline and Hazardous  
Materials Safety  
Administration

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

**Safety Advisory Notice Encouraging the Use  
of Real-Time Train Consist Information in 9-1-1 Call Centers  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration  
Office of Hazardous Materials Safety**

**Why PHMSA Created this Safety Advisory Notice**

As part of our ongoing efforts to advance the safe transportation of hazardous materials by rail, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), in coordination with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), is issuing this safety advisory to encourage 9-1-1 call centers—including both emergency communications centers and public safety answering points (PSAPs)—to download, register, train on, and use available technologies, such as the AskRail® application (AskRail app or application), that are designed to provide critical information to first responders in the event of a rail incident.

*Disclaimer:* This safety advisory is considered guidance under DOT Order 2100.6A (June 7, 2021). Except when referencing laws, regulations, policies, or orders, the information in this safety advisory does not have the force and effect of law and is not meant to bind the public in any way. This document does not revise or replace any previously issued guidance.

## **Background**

Timely access to information about the identity and hazards posed by a hazardous material is critical in the event of an incident. Package markings, color-coded diamond-shaped hazard class labels and placards, and shipment information carried by the vehicle operator all communicate information about the hazards presented by a hazardous material in transportation. In the rail mode, the document that describes the content of each rail car transporting hazardous materials and its place in the train is commonly known as a “train consist.” The locomotive crew maintains and updates the train consist as rail cars are picked up and delivered throughout the train’s trip. A train consist is most commonly presented as a physical, printed document, although PHMSA has authorized some rail carriers to provide train consist information on a portable electronic device (e.g., a tablet) under DOT Special Permits.

### **The AskRail Application**

The Association of American Railroads has voluntarily developed a smartphone and computer application known as AskRail® that can provide train consist information to any bona fide emergency response organization or emergency communications center that registers and is accepted into the AskRail system. The AskRail app can provide train consist information for an entire train from the reporting mark of a single rail car or locomotive in the train. The AskRail app also integrates emergency response information from PHMSA’s Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG), including overlaying isolation and evacuation distances onto map data of the incident site. The train consist information presented by the AskRail app provides critical information to first responders that can be utilized to establish initial defensive response actions to a hazardous materials incident, which can protect not only the general public but also the lives and health of emergency responders approaching the scene of an accident.

PHMSA previously issued a similar safety advisory notice urging railroads to review access to the AskRail App along the their rights-of-way; ensure adequate coverage and availability; proactively publicize the availability and utility of the AskRail app; and provide training on the AskRail app to qualified emergency responders.<sup>1</sup> PHMSA and FRA encourage emergency response organizations and 9-1-1 call centers (e.g., emergency communication centers and PSAPs) to register and use all available means to access emergency response information for hazardous materials involved in transportation incidents, including the AskRail app for rail incidents. Maintaining multiple access points to the emergency response information via both the emergency responders at the scene, as well as via 9-1-1 call centers, provides redundancy and helps ensure access to necessary information in the event of cellular data outage due to inclement weather, power failure, or lack of coverage at the accident site. Additional information about the AskRail app, including security requirements to access the information contained in the app and training opportunities, is available here: [www.askrail.us](http://www.askrail.us).<sup>2</sup>

### **Safety Advisory**

PHMSA, in coordination with FRA, encourages 9-1-1 call centers to download available resources and specifically download the AskRail app, register to use it, access training opportunities to learn how to use it, and use the app during rail hazardous materials incidents to provide critical information to emergency responders.

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<sup>1</sup> Safety Advisory Notice for Railroad Emergency Preparedness, [PHMSA Safety Advisory - Railroad Emergency Response Plans.pdf \(dot.gov\)](https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/sites/PHMSA/files/2017-08/PHMSA_Safety_Advisory_-_Railroad_Emergency_Response_Plans.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The United States Government is not responsible for the contents of the AskRail application. PHMSA, the United States Department of Transportation, and the United States Government cannot guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information presented in the AskRail application. The United States Government assumes no liability for the use of the AskRail application by any third party.

## **Future Actions**

PHMSA has issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) under legislative mandates in the 2015 FAST Act and 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to require railroads to provide real-time train consist information to authorized emergency response and enforcement personnel involved in response to or an investigation of an accident, incident, or public health or safety emergency involving the rail transportation of hazardous materials. Please review the NPRM at the following URL: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/06/27/2023-13467/hazardous-materials-fast-act-requirements-for-real-time-train-consist-information>.

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