

Nationwide Rail Services gains safety advantage with each drop-and-hook

Fleet credits electronic height control system with reducing driver injuries and boosting productivity.

If Nationwide Rail Services were to include “safety” as a line item in its assets, it wouldn’t seem far-fetched to its insurance carrier. The 30 drivers employed by NRS perform 300 to 400 drop-and-hook operations every day, with a chance for injury each time — more so as the average age of the driver increases. But NRS is proactively mitigating workers’ compensation costs, and its insurance carrier is participating in the process.

“Our company’s success is built on a foundation of safety,” says NRS President and CEO Joseph Barton. “We take great pride in our strong relationship with safety coordinators and trainers at our insurance carrier in our ongoing quest for top-notch safety.

“Many of the trailer lots that NRS supports have trailers wedged in too tight to access landing gear, the lots are uneven from years of trailer storage, and, due to new [federal] rules, drivers have limited time to wait for yard trucks,” he explains. “All this results in drivers having to get in and out of the cab far more often with each drop-and-hook.”

NRS discovered that drivers getting in and out of the cab account for the highest number of trucking injuries, with the second



NRS shared with their insurance company how the SmartValve reduces driver injuries by conducting a live demonstration with the assistance of Rush Truck Centers.

highest resulting from the strain involved in adjusting landing gear. With an average of \$55,000 per workers’ comp claim for significant, non-fatal drop-and-hook related injuries, NRS looked for a solution to keep drivers safer and healthier.

Rush Truck Centers in Huntley, Illinois, recommended the fleet install the Hadley SmartValve, an electronic height control system with advanced features to make drop-and-hook operations faster, easier, and safer. NRS installed the SmartValve system on five of its International ProStar day cabs in September 2016.

According to Barton, NRS found that SmartValve boosted safety for those drivers and as an added value, it boosted efficiency with reduced drop-and-hook time. He says thanks to the suspension over-height feature, SmartValve is “a big help in reducing strain,” particularly since the drivers are adjusting landing gear 10 to 14 times a day.

Using the existing air suspension, the SmartValve allows the driver to raise the landing gear off the ground, which alleviates the pressure created with a loaded trailer

and reduces the effort required to wind up the landing gear.

The driver also can safely access trailer landing gear in tight spots by using the truck’s frame rails to lift and move the trailer. In many cases, this also moves the trailer out of “potholes” created by trailer legs that are often filled with ice in winter. That means fewer trips out of the cab.

NRS installed SmartValve on its entire fleet in January of this year. Having been through the winter months, Barton says the company is convinced of the safety benefits. The fleet shared the results with its insurance company via a live demonstration, conducted with the assistance of Rush Truck Centers. Barton points out that NRS drivers operate landing gear roughly 56,000 times in a year. Since adding SmartValves, he’s halved that number of operations and significantly reduced chances for injuries. He notes as well that SmartValve is helping keep his drivers more satisfied with their job. “At just \$1 per day of extra operating expense over a three-year period for SmartValve, it is easily worth it.”

FLEET SNAPSHOT

- Who:** Nationwide Rail Services
- Where:** Burr Ridge, Illinois
- Fleet:** 30 International ProStar day cabs
- Operations:** Intermodal short and long haul, primarily in the Midwest
- Fun Fact:** Joseph Barton Sr., who launched NRS in 1988, used an old camp trailer as the company’s first office.
- Challenge:** Reducing driver injuries and workers’ comp costs