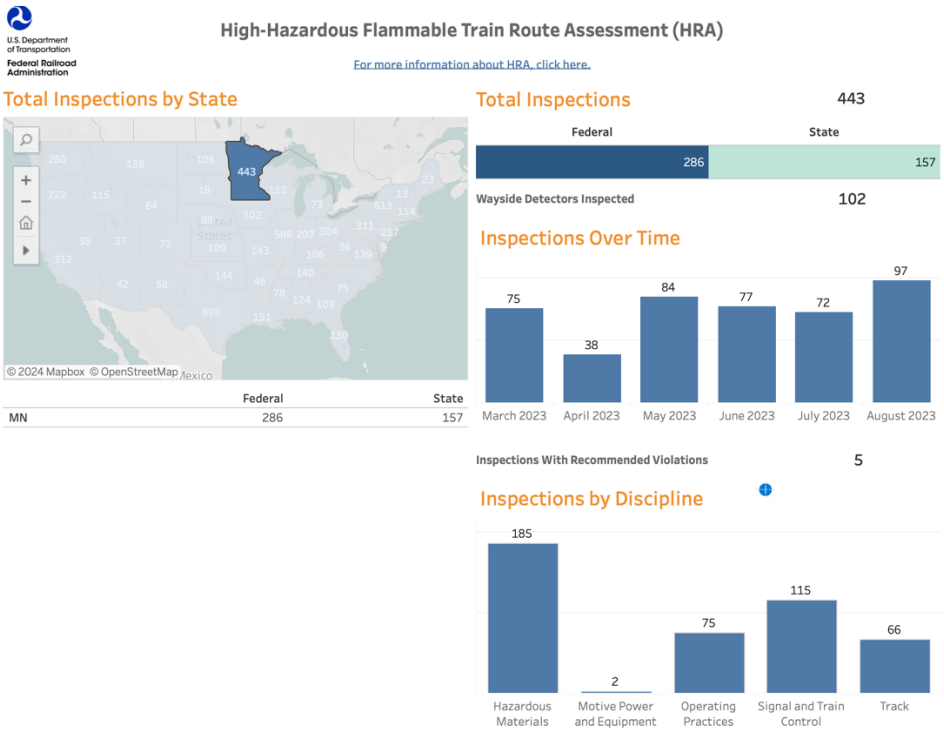
Railroad Inspections in Minnesota

In response to the Norfolk Southern derailment in East Palestine, FRA's Office of Railroad Safety initiated a nationwide High-Hazard Flammable Train Route Assessment (HRA)[1] involving FRA inspectors and state program inspectors in March of 2023. The inspection activities have continued for the past year and review five technical disciplines: hazardous materials; motive power and equipment; operating practices; signal and train control; and track. (Descriptions of each of these can be found on the following page.)

As of April 17, over the past twelve months:

- 443 total inspections have been conducted in Minnesota.
    - 286 by federal inspectors and 102 by state inspectors.
- 102 wayside detectors were inspected.
- 5 inspections recommended violations – a rate of 1.13%.



Minnesota had the fourth most inspections conducted in the country:

Texas:	698
New York:	613
Illinois:	586
Minnesota:	**443**
California:	312

The FRA conducted more operating practices inspections in Minnesota than in any other state. These inspections focus on best practices for responding to wayside detector notifications by dispatch and operating crews and ensuring properly trained and qualified personnel are performing dispatch and operating functions.

[1] https://railroads.dot.gov/railroad-safety/2023-high-hazard-flammable-train-route-assessment-hra

Hazardous Materials

- Verify proper train make-up and consist accuracy.
- Evaluate railroads' response and communication processes with communities through which hazardous materials are being transported.
- Inspect hazardous materials cars in service for compliance with hazardous materials regulations and FRA regulations.
- Verify proper notification of states' emergency response agencies and whether the state agencies notify communities.

Motive Power and Equipment

- Inspect strategically selected trains at initial terminal locations and locations where crew inspections are regularly conducted.
- Ensure proper mechanical inspections and Class 1 brake tests are performed on hazmat placarded freight and tank cars in accordance with 49 CFR 215 freight car safety standards, Part 231 safety appliance standards, and Part 232 power brake safety standards.
- Determine challenges to the phase out of specification DOT 111 tank cars.

Operating Practices

- Dispatch: Determine best practices for responding to wayside detector notifications and ensuring properly qualified personnel are performing dispatch functions.
- Operating Crews: Determine best practices for responding to wayside detector notifications and ensuring proper training and qualifications of crews, focusing on individual's territorial qualifications and hazardous materials-specific training including recognition and proper handling of hazardous materials in train and awareness of accompanying risks.

Signal and Train Control

- Evaluate the policies, procedures, practices, and compliance of Class I railroads in areas identified as the most critical assets (e.g., bridges, movable bridges, tunnels), as related to derailments.
- Review and inspect hot bearing detector systems.
- Determine the adherence to the processes and procedures for unusual contingency detectors that are currently unregulated.
- Review and inspect active grade crossing warning system locations and switch inspections that are routinely executed in the daily duties and performance of FRA's inspectors.

Track

- Inspect conditions of track and other structures' overall condition and compliance with railroad-specific maintenance plans and procedures.
- When wayside detectors are present, evaluate whether the conditions of track and structures impede the performance of the detectors.
- Conduct Automated Track Inspection Program survey of identified routes.

Information compiled from the FRA website by Amber Backhaus at the Minnesota Regional Railroads Association.