



MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Consumer Group Forming

By Didrik A. Voss, MMR

One of the primary goals of the NMRA is to improve the hobby by establishing conformance standards. This effort, as managed by the NMRA Technical Department, has established standards that allow products provided by many manufacturers to work together. For 70 years this department has provided this critical function to our hobby.

The standards that have been established have also been enthusiastically adopted by manufacturers. The adoption of standards for Digital Command Control (DCC) is the most recent and, perhaps, most successful example. But the hobby is not static and neither are the standards which change as new innovations and features are developed.

Although this function is critical to the hobby, many members have questioned the benefit of belonging to NMRA since many standards have been established and don't really change very much. In other words, "What have they done for me lately?" To address this concern, NMRA is forming a new body called the "Consumer Group." It will be part of the Technical Department, headed by Rutger Friberg, MMR.

The purpose of the Consumer Group is to provide a repository of comments, both good and bad, about products and services in the model railroading world. We may, or may not, pass the comments on to the manufacturers, depending on the nature and severity of the complaint. However, the Consumer Group should not be considered the primary pipeline back to the manufacturer. Think of the *Consumer Reports* magazine and you will have an idea of what the Consumer Group is established to do.

The Consumer Group will give you a chance to provide feedback on how manufacturers are following NMRA Standards. For example, a member purchased three steam engines from one manufacturer and found 19 of the 27 axles out of gauge.

The member presented this concern to the manufacturer on its Web site. Three days later the comment was totally buried in dozens of other comments and the member's concerns were never addressed by the manufacturer. Although he was able to correct the gauge problem by dismantling the engines and tenders, he was concerned that other modelers may not discover why the engines keep derailing and never take time to correct the problem.

This new forum, where problems can be shared with other NMRA members, should be of great benefit to the membership.

Initially, the comments will be organized as follows:

1) Railroad Equipment

- a) Locomotives
- b) Rolling Stock
- c) Structures
- d) Accessories
- e) Track

2) Structures

- a) Plastic
- b) Laser-cut kits
- c) Other

3) Electrical

- a) DCC
- b) DC

4) Software

- a) Design
- b) Operations
- c) DCC Decoder Programming

5) Scenery Material

6) Scratchbuilding Materials

7) Retail Sales (including Mail Order and Internet Sellers)

This organization will probably change as your comments are received. It really depends on your concerns and comments.

Your comments and concerns should be structured as follows:

- Your name, address, telephone, e-mail, and NMRA #

- Product, model number, manufacturer, date of purchase, place of purchase

- Comment (full description of problem. Photographs are OK if appropriate.)

- Review by hobby shop or Master Model Railroader

- Name and signature of hobby shop owner or MMR with NMRA #

The reason for having the hobby shop or fellow MMR review your comments is to validate the problem and to acknowledge if the problem is worthy of sending forward. It may be that the problem was not created by the manufacturer but by local modifications or abuse. Besides, this will give you another excuse to visit your local hobby shop.

Send your written comments to Consumer Group at the NMRA HQ address (4121 Cromwell Rd., Chattanooga, TN 37421), or via e-mail to consumer@hq.nmra.org. The e-mail address does not allow attachments, so put your comments in the main body of the e-mail.

Please keep your comments brief. And keep in mind the Consumer Group is considered a repository of comments and not an advocate for one NMRA member against a manufacturer. Remember, NMRA is a volunteer organization and members who volunteer to help with this program have regular jobs and want to solve their own model railroading problems. However, by publishing these comments periodically, this should help to resolve the issues.

We also plan to have future articles comparing similar models on the market and judging their conformance to NMRA Standards. Most of you know that manufacturers can submit products to the NMRA Technical Department for evaluation to determine if the product meets all NMRA specifications. If the product passes, the manufacturer is allowed to place the NMRA C&I conformance warrant on their literature and

Continued on Page 39

Membership News

Continued from Page 38

packaging. This certificate is a mark of quality craftsmanship and construction. The hobbyist can feel comfortable this “football” is a seal of quality and assurance and that the product meets the NMRA Standards. Unfortunately, many manufacturers do not submit products for evaluation, either because they feel the hobbyist pays no attention to this conformance certificate or the product knowingly does not meet the standard.

The NMRA Technical Department, which does the evaluation, takes a passive position when evaluating products. That is, no evaluation is made unless the manufacturer asks for the evaluation. However, the new Consumer

Group will take an active position on evaluating products. That is, it will evaluate products on the market for conformance to the NMRA standards, whether or not the product has been submitted by the manufacturer. Also, the Consumer Group will listen to the membership and respond to their desires for future evaluations. This department will evaluate equivalent products using common criteria to determine if the product meets NMRA standards; try to rate the products from best to worst; and even make a “Best Buy” recommendation if appropriate.

Periodically, the Consumer Group will solicit information from MMRs by sending surveys asking for their evaluation of products. Hopefully, we will get enough responses to let you know what the experts in our hobby think.

Attention all MMRs

If you would like to participate in this program, please send your current e-mail address to consumer@hq.nmra.org.

Model railroad products have continuously improved over the past decades and we expect that trend to continue. The NMRA recognizes the value manufacturers place on producing quality products at a good value. We believe this program will be very helpful to manufacturers as they strive to provide the highest quality models to the hobby.

Please take the time to provide positive as well as negative comments about products and services you have received. After all, the goal of the Consumer Group is to provide honest and balanced information to the membership. 📧

100-Percent Clubs Qualify for NMRA Insurance

*By Ben Pearlman,
Member Services Manager*

Are you a member of a model railroading club? Does the club have a layout? Does the club host meets, mini-conventions, jamborees, auc-

works: You send in an application, which is nothing more than a list of the club member names and their NMRA membership numbers to NMRA Headquarters in Chattanooga, attention: Office Manager.

year.

Talk about it at your next club meeting, but first look into obtaining insurance on your own. We don't think you can beat the NMRA's coverage and price. But if you can, we'd like to know about it, because we might want to change insurance companies!

Insurance is something your club can't afford to be without, and being a 100% Club is the most affordable way you can obtain insurance.

tions, or other functions to which the public is invited? And are these meets held at your clubhouse or in a location away from there? Have you ever been asked to present an insurance certificate before you can rent a hall, school, or fire station?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, the NMRA has an offer for you! Your club can purchase liability insurance for just \$50. That's \$50.00 per year—not per event. And you'll be protected from liability-related litigation, whether based on legitimate accidents or fraudulent claims. Even if your club hosts a weekly auction, a monthly open house, and quarterly train shows, you are covered.

To apply for this insurance all you have to do is have your club recognized as a 100% NMRA Club.

Yep. That's it. If your club has 3, 30, or 300 members. It doesn't matter. As long as they are all real members of the NMRA.

Becoming a 100% Club is easy. Here's how it

The application will be processed, you'll receive notification of the club's 100% status along with a nice looking certificate you can display.

Now you're ready to apply for NMRA liability insurance well in advance of your public function. When applying for the insurance, send the \$50.00 payment along with your request for insurance. You'll be notified when the insurance is in place and will be ready to hold your function—worry-free*. Well, you might have other worries, but liability insurance won't be one of them.

Insurance is good for one year and currently runs from November through October of the following year, so you'll need to renew your policy before it expires each

For more details and other information, contact NMRA Headquarters, 4121 Cromwell Rd., Chattanooga, TN 37421. You can call them at 423-892-2846, or e-mail them at hq@hq.nmra.org.

Remember, insurance is something your club can't afford to be without, and being a 100% Club is the most affordable way you can obtain insurance.

*Both the NMRA and its insurance provider reserve the right to deny insurance coverage. 📧

Membership Thermometer

	Total	Count Change
Apr. 2004	19,762	(28)
May 2004	19,798	.36
Jun. 2004	19,877	.79
Jul. 2004	19,789	(88)
Aug. 2004	19,823	.34
Sep. 2004	19,545	(278)
Oct. 2004	19,550	.5
Nov. 2004	19,510	(40)
Dec. 2004	19,365	(145)
Jan. 2005	19,478	.135
Feb. 2005	19,462	(16)
Mar. 2005	19,282	(180)