

CHOO! CHOO!

Big Ed doesn't mind that the emollient
and the water
we mix to make coolant for our machines
are 100 yards apart
at opposite ends of the building separated
by our 3-rowed array of machinery,
he just stiffens his jaw
and takes hikes
with the 100-gallon steel barrel
on wheels,
pouring the quart of emollient into it at one end of the
building and then rolling the barrel
the length of the building toward the water faucet
at the other end,
digging into the concrete aisleway with his heels
and putting his muscle into it,
increasing the speed of the rolling barrel and getting
a rhythm going with the clacking of the wheels
over the bumps and cracks in the concrete aisleway,
able to keep control of the lurching directions of the
barrel so as to avoid running into
expeditors or supervisors walking the aisles
and yet able to increase the speed
of the clacking
to the point where the rolling barrel sounds just
like a train rolling down the tracks
and admiring machinists at their machines
are doing ear-splitting train whistle imitations
and lifting their caps and staring
with admiration.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

The old guy
sits in the tiny trailer
after the hearing test
and listens to the nurse tell him
about the irreparable damage
working in building 44 eight hours a day
may be doing to his ears
after 30 years of not wearing earplugs
or ear muffs.
He chuckles as he gets up and walks out the door
back to the screaming pounding din
of the building,
holding his head up
and saying proudly,
"The only time I'll start worrying about that is when
I can't hear the buzzer to go home!"