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Tennessee layoffs set post-pandemic record in 2025

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Nashville Tennessean

USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

Mass layoffs hit Tennessee businesses in 2025, from FedEx and Bridgestone to Kroger and Vanderbilt University Medical Center. The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development reported 8,856 employees laid off during the year, which is the highest number on record since the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

Mass layoffs in Tennessee rose 20.9% in 2025 compared with the previous year and were up 139.3% from 2021.

A recent surge in artificial intelligence usage, the cooling labor market and shifting U.S. trade policies throughout the year all contributed to the rise in Tennessee layoffs, economists said.

"Artificial intelligence is spreading to every single tentacle of the economy," Middle Tennessee State University's Business and Economic Research Center Director Murat Arik said. "Based on the technological shifts, A.I., cost elements and disruption in logistics, restructuring is happening for so many companies. They're basically reevaluating what

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Schneider Electric plant manager Adrianna Perea speaks to guests during a Nov. 11, 2025, plant tour at the grand opening of the manufacturing facility in Mt. Juliet. WADE PAYNE/FOR THE TENNESSEAN

Freight rail industry dirtier than coal power plants



Railroad locomotive pollution causes an estimated \$48 billion in health care costs and 3,100 premature deaths annually in the United States, according to the EPA's Co-Benefits Risk Assessment tool. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Aging locomotives, pushback on regulation contribute to pollution problem

Tim McLaughlin

REUTERS

BNSF Railway, one of the crown jewels of Warren Buffett's sprawling Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate, calls itself an environmental leader in the U.S. rail industry with the cleanest locomotive fleet in North America.

"When you see our orange locomotives' and freight cars' steel wheels moving on steel rails, think green," BNSF says in its latest sustainability overview.

But the company is the largest player in an industry that has a pollution problem: U.S. freight railroads are a major source of pollution, huffing out more nitrogen oxide, the primary component of smog, than all the nation's coal-fired power plants combined, according to a Reuters calculation

"Americans don't realize how much harmful pollution comes from old diesel locomotives. EPA should require the railroad companies to modernize their fleets."

Bill Magavern

Policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air

using government data.

U.S. railroads together produced about 485,000 tons of nitrogen oxide in 2024, compared to 452,000 tons emitted by U.S. coal-fired power plants, according to a Reuters calculation of reported annual fuel consumption multiplied by the EPA's 2023 weighted-average emission rates.

BNSF, the nation's largest freight railroad, accounts for about a third of that to-

tal, producing 161,500 tons of smog-causing nitrogen oxide in 2024, according to the data.

"We don't dispute your number. BNSF is the biggest Class I railroad by volume," BNSF said in an email.

BNSF's position as largest in the rail industry, as well as its profitability, will be

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How 5 TN districts decide when flu cancels school

Rachel Wegner

Nashville Tennessean

USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

While flu cases have declined somewhat in nationwide so far in January, flu activity remains high in many parts of Tennessee, according to the latest state data.

Flu cases typically rise during the fall and winter, reaching their highest numbers in Tennessee in January and February, according to the state Health Department.

While some flu statistics show a drop, other indicators show the season is far from over. Experts have also warned that a new flu mutation, known as subclade K, is driving the spread of cases and could make things worse.

"Elevated influenza activity is expected to continue for several more weeks," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a Jan. 9 report.

Here's what to know about the flu and its impact on Tennessee schools, families and kids.

How Middle Tennessee schools decide to cancel for flu, illness

What does it take for schools to cancel class due to illnesses like the flu? Here's how several major districts around Middle Tennessee make decisions.

Clarksville-Montgomery County School System

The Clarksville-Montgomery County School System monitors student and employee attendance daily and works closely with county health officials, according to spokesperson Anthony Johnson. However, he said there is no specific number of cases or other threshold that determines school closures.

"In the event of a significant spike in illness, CMCSS will review the data in collaboration with the Montgomery County Health Department to determine if it is necessary to use a stockpile day ... to close one or more schools, which has been rare both before and

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