

Railroad Crossing Safety FactSheet

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Frequency

A train hits someone in America every 115 minutes, often with fatal results. According to Operation Lifesaver, a national non-profit organization, nearly 2,000 Americans are killed and injured at highway/rail grade crossings each year. This number is greater than people dying in commercial and general aviation crashes combined. In 2003, 2,919 collisions occurred at railroad crossings resulting in 324 deaths. (Federal Railroad Administration.)

Conditions

The majority of collisions between trains and motor vehicles occur when trains are traveling at less than 35 mph. In a quarter of all collisions, the train is already in the crossing when the car hits it. Since nearly two-thirds of all collisions occur during daylight hours, in crossings equipped with automatic warning devices, driver inattention must be the major cause.

The average train weighs 12 million pounds, so the weight ratio of a train to a car is about 4,000 to one. This compares to the weight ratio of a car to an aluminum can. The same thing happens to the car hit by a train as happens to a can run over by a car—it gets squashed. A train traveling at 50 mph, pulling 100 cars, takes one mile to stop, so in a contest between a car and a train, the train always wins. The motorist in a train/motor vehicle collision is 40 times more likely to die than in a collision between two motor vehicles. Unfortunately, commercially licensed truck and semi-trailer drivers were involved in 24 percent of train/motor vehicle collisions in 1998. After a tractor-trailer comes to a stop at a railroad crossing, it takes 27 seconds to cross the track at 2 mph. A train traveling at 41 mph covers 660 feet—in 11 seconds, which is as far up the tracks as the truck driver can see. Those who drive for a living must practice crossing safety.

Prevention

There are many simple and life-saving practices to help you avoid a confrontation with a train at a railroad crossing.

- Remember that any time is train time.
- Slow down when approaching a railroad crossing and look both ways—TWICE!
- Never race a train to cross the tracks.



Photo Credit: US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

- Never pass another vehicle within 100 feet of a railroad crossing.
- Watch out for vehicles that MUST stop at railroad crossings, like school buses or trucks carrying hazardous materials.
- When approaching a crossing, roll down your windows, turn off the radio or air conditioner, and listen for whistles or bells
- Always yield to flashing lights, whistles, closing gates, crossbucks or stop signs.
- Never shift gears on the railroad crossing, downshift before you reach it.
- If you must stop, keep a distance of 15 to 50 feet from the tracks. Since the tracks are four feet eight and a half inches wide, and the train hangs three feet past the rails on each side, be sure to leave enough space between your vehicle and the tracks.
- Teach children that the railroad is never a place to play, walk, run, bike ride, or use as a short cut. Don't fish from railroad bridges either.
- Always cross the tracks at the designated railroad crossing or pedestrian crossing.
- Only use the crossing if you can be sure your vehicle is high enough to completely clear the railroad crossing without stopping.
- Don't be fooled by the optical illusion presented by the train. It is always moving faster and is much closer than you think.

Stalled Vehicle

Should your vehicle stall on the tracks and you see a train approaching, GET OUT OF THE VEHICLE IMMEDIATELY, MOVE AWAY FROM THE CROSSING, AND MOVE TOWARDS THE APPROACHING TRAIN. This way you can avoid injury from flying debris. Call 911 immediately and inform police about the stalled vehicle.

If you drive into the railroad crossing and the gate behind you comes down, keep driving, even if it means you break the crossing gate ahead of you. Never drive around a crossing gate that is down. If you suspect the gate is malfunctioning, call your local law enforcement or railroad company immediately. You can usually find the company emergency contact number, including the U.S. DOT Inventory Crossing Number (six numbers and a letter) that identifies your location, on the crossbuck post.

Responsibility

It's your responsibility to avoid a train since it cannot avoid you. Always keep in mind that any time is train time. Remember to look, listen and live. Stopping may add 30 seconds to your journey while not stopping could put an end to it completely. ANY TIME IS TRAIN TIME!

Remember to practice safety. Don't learn it by accident.

This fact sheet was published with information from Baldwin & Lyons *The Quill* and the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI), Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC).

Disclaimer: Information in this publication is considered accurate at time of publication.

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