



# Railroad Safety and Driver Education

*Driver Education Instructors, railroad safety is an important lesson for new drivers. Be sure to share this information with students during classroom discussions on safe driving practices.*

## RULES OF THE ROAD...AND RAILROAD

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**Never drive around lowered gates.** It's illegal and can be deadly. If the gates are down, stop and stay in place. Do not cross the tracks until the gates are raised and the lights have stopped flashing.

**Never race a train to the crossing.** Even if you tie, you lose.

**Don't stop once you start.** Only proceed through a highway-rail grade crossing if you're sure you can completely clear the crossing. If you start over a crossing and the flashing lights or gates start down, don't freeze; keep going. The warning signals, when first activated, allow enough time to drive over the crossing before the train arrives.

**Be aware that trains cannot stop quickly.** Even if the engineer sees you, a train moving at 55 mph can take a mile or more to stop. That's the length of 18 football fields!

**Get out of your vehicle if it stalls.** If your vehicle stalls on a track while a train is coming, get out immediately and move quickly away from the tracks in the opposite direction the train is traveling. If you run in the same direction as the train, you could be injured by flying debris. Call your local law enforcement agency for assistance.

**Do not be fooled.** The train you see is closer and moving faster than you think. If you see a train approaching, wait for it to go by before you proceed across the tracks.

**Do not get trapped on the tracks.** Gates won't trap you, but a halt in highway traffic flow might. Be sure the traffic ahead of you will not stop and box you in on a track. Also, be aware when pulling up to crossing gates you stop far enough back so if a vehicle behind you fails to stop, your car will not be thrown forward into the train.

**Be extra alert at night or in bad weather.** Never overdrive your headlights; you may suddenly see a train when you're going too fast and are too close to stop. About one of every four crossing crashes involves a car driving into a train. Watch for the advance warning sign, slow down and be prepared to stop.

**Familiarity breeds contempt.** Although you may be familiar with your local crossings, never take train times for granted.

**Observe the lifesaving signs and signals.** If motorists obeyed all existing traffic laws, there would be virtually no grade crossing collisions. Make sure you understand and follow the railroad safety signs and signals that keep us all safe – they're there for a reason.

**Cut out distractions.** Turn your cell phone, MP3 players and radio off when you're near train tracks. Forget texting as it could be a deadly distraction near railroad tracks.

**Expect a train on any track at any time.** Most trains do not travel on a regular schedule, so anytime is train time. Also, be patient while waiting for a train to pass; darting out just as the train passes may put you in the path of another train on a second track. Wait until the lights stop flashing and the train has completely cleared.

**Extra, extra – things to remember.** Never make a U-turn in the vicinity of a highway-rail crossing. And, always cross the tracks in low gear; do not change gears while crossing.



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## COMMON CAUSES OF CROSSING COLLISIONS

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- The driver sees the train coming, but misjudges speed and distance.
- The driver races the train to the crossing and is either struck by the train or runs into the train's side.
- As a train clears a crossing, the driver immediately starts across the tracks without looking for other trains and is struck by a train running on an adjacent track.
- Driver becomes "too familiar" with a crossing and uses no caution when coming to a crossing.
- The driver fails to observe and obey the advance railroad warning sign and other warning signs and signals.
- While driving at night or in an unfamiliar location, the driver travels at a speed too great and cannot stop in time or drives in front of a train.
- Radio, cell phones and other distractions avert the driver's attention.
- Windows of the drivers' car are frosted or dirty and the driver cannot properly see warning signs or the approaching train.

## FAST FACTS – PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

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- About every 90 minutes a vehicle and train collide in the U.S.
- 94 percent of all grade crossing accidents are caused by risky driver behavior.
- Most vehicle/train crashes occur at highway-rail grade crossings within 25 miles of the driver's home.
- You are 30 times more likely to die in a collision with a train than a collision with another automobile.
- Approximately half of all railroad crossing incidents occur when gates and flashing lights or other active warning devices are present and operational.
- 64 percent of all collisions take place during the daylight hours.
- Nearly half of all highway-rail crashes occur when the train is traveling under 30 mph.
- One in five people do not know the full meaning of the Crossbuck sign (slow down, look and listen).