



TRUCK TALK

RAILROAD CROSSINGS: POTENTIAL DANGER FOR DRIVERS, EQUIPMENT AND LOADS

Avoid Potential Hazards

Complacency toward railroad crossings can lead to a major vehicular accident resulting in destruction of cargo or equipment, serious injury or death. This is certainly NOT how any driver would want to end the work day! What are the potential hazards and how can we avoid them?

As you approach any rail crossing

Always approach a rail crossing with care. Keep in mind that signal lights installed at the crossing may or may not be functional. If signal lights warn of an approaching train or on-track vehicle, you should slow down, warning others of your intention to stop. If no signal lights exist, you should still slow down to allow for good, clear views in both directions and always be prepared to stop if a train or other vehicle is approaching.

As you approach the crossing and slow down, it's always a good idea to roll windows down and listen for the horn of a train or other vehicle. Remember that railroad tracks are used by vehicles other than trains. These vehicles include signal and track repair crews along with the equipment they use. These vehicles are smaller than the average train but can be just as dangerous.

Crossing the tracks

Make sure that your vehicle can complete the crossing. Many times, railroad crossings are raised above the road as a sort of hump. If you are pulling a low-slung trailer such as a drop frame flat bed or a livestock trailer, make sure that the rise of the tracks will clear the lowest portion of your trailer.

As you begin to cross the track, a quick look in both directions can help you avoid a train or an oncoming on-track vehicle. Cross slowly making sure that you can complete the crossing of all tracks once you start. While waiting for a train to pass at a multiple track crossing, watch for a second train on the other tracks approaching from either direction. In some cases, a traffic signal after the crossing might force you to leave part of the trailer on the tracks and in harm's way. Know your vehicle's length and make sure that all of it will clear all tracks before proceeding.



Stopped or stuck on the tracks?

Get out of your vehicle and to safety immediately! It's fairly safe to say that if you can see a train, it's probably not going to be able to stop. Fully-loaded trains can take up to a mile to stop. Walk toward the train, but not on or near the tracks, to a safe location. Remember that a railroad car can be up to 3 feet wider (on each side) than the tracks.

Call the authorities (dial 9-1-1) and notify them of where and how your vehicle is stopped on the tracks. Location information is posted on the crossing gate, signal pole or switch house and is noted as a DOT or AAR crossing number. Some crossings have the emergency number of the

railroad that operates the tracks posted near the crossing sign or gate. If this information is available, a call should be made after the law enforcement authorities have been notified.

As railroads streamline their operations and phase out some tracks, the use of remaining tracks tends to rise. As an example, in Detroit Lakes, MN a train passes through the metropolitan area every 20 minutes. Statistically, there has been a 30% reduction in the number of highway rail crossings nationally. Logically, remaining crossings are busier. Railroad crossing gates are installed at approximately 35% of the total crossings.

Remember to ALWAYS EXPECT A TRAIN! SLOW DOWN, LOOK BOTH WAYS AND LISTEN!

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