

STATEWIDE INSURANCE DIGEST NO. 104

RAILROAD CROSSING SAFETY

Low rates for auto insurance are realized through safe driving. The article below summarizes railroad crossing safety tips.

A train hits someone in America every 115 minutes! According to Operation Lifesaver, nearly 2,000 Americans are killed and injured at highway/railroad crossings each year. This number is greater than people dying in commercial and general aviation crashes combined.

The average train weighs 12 million pounds; pulling 100 cars and travelling at 50 mph, it takes *one mile* to stop. The weight of a train to a car is about 4,000 to one; or about the same as a car to 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.

The majority of collisions between trains and motor vehicles occur (a) when trains are travelling less than 35 mph; (b) in 25 percent of all collisions, the train is already in the crossing when the car hits it; and (c) nearly 67 percent of collisions occur in daylight hours in crossing equipped with automatic warning devices. *Thus, driver inattention is the primary cause.* Following are some simple and life-saving practices to help avoid a confrontation with a train at a railroad crossing.

1. Remember that *anytime* is train time.
2. Slow down when approaching a railroad crossing and look both ways – *twice*.
3. Never race a train to cross the tracks.
4. Never pass another vehicle within 100 feet of a railroad crossing.
5. Watch out for vehicles that must stop at railroad crossings, like school buses or trucks carrying hazardous materials.
6. When approaching a crossing, roll down your windows, turnoff the radio or air conditioner, and listen for whistles or bells.
7. Always yield to flashing lights, whistles, closing gates, crossbuck, or stop signs.
8. Never shift gears on the railroad crossing; downshift before you reach it.
9. If you must stop, keep a distance of 15 to 50 feet from the tracks. Since the tracks are 4 feet 8½ inches wide, and the train hangs 3 feet past the rails on each side, be sure to leave enough space between your vehicle and the tracks.
10. Teach children that the railroad track is never a place to play, walk, run, bike ride, or use as a short cut. Don't fish from railroad bridges either.

11. Always cross the tracks at the designated railroad crossing or pedestrian crossing.
12. Only use the crossing if you can be sure your vehicle is high enough to completely clear the railroad crossing without stopping.
13. Don't be fooled by the optical illusion presented by an oncoming train. It is always moving faster and is much closer than you think.
14. 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.
15. Never drive around a crossing gate that is down. If you suspect the gate is malfunctioning, call your local law enforcement or the railroad company immediately. You can usually find the company emergency contact number – including the US DOT Inventory Crossing Number that identifies your location on the crossbuck post.
16. If you drive into the railroad crossing and the gate behind you comes down, keep driving forward, even if it means you break the crossing gate ahead of you.

*It is your responsibility to avoid a train since it cannot avoid you. Always look, listen, and live. Stopping may add 30 seconds to your journey while not stopping could put an end to it completely. Always remember: anytime is train time! Following these safety tips will promote driver safety, reduce train-related accidents, and help obtain **low rate auto insurance.***

Source: Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation, "Railroad Crossing Safety Fact Sheet."