

# Railroad Crossing Safety Fact Sheet

HS04-070B (08-23)

**E**very three hours in the United States a person or vehicle is hit by a train, often with fatal results.<sup>1</sup> According to [Operation Lifesaver](#), a national non-profit rail safety organization, about 2,000 Americans are killed and injured at highway-rail crossings each year.<sup>2</sup> Texas leads the U.S. in the number of highway-rail collisions, with 241 incidents occurring in 2022, resulting in 80 injuries and 31 deaths.<sup>3</sup>

## Collisions

The majority of collisions between trains and motor vehicles occur when trains are traveling less than 30 mph.<sup>4</sup> In a quarter of all collisions, the train is already in the crossing when the car hits it.<sup>5</sup> Since about half of these collisions



occur where active warning devices are present, it suggests that people are making decisions to go around the lights and gates.<sup>6,7</sup> Driver inattention is considered a major cause.

## Those who drive for a living must practice crossing safety.



The average freight train weighs 12 million pounds, outweighing a car by a ratio of 4,000 to 1.<sup>8</sup> This compares to the weight of a car striking an aluminum can.



A train traveling at 55 mph takes about a mile to stop.<sup>9</sup> That is the length of 18 football fields.



Railroad tracks are private property. Walking on a train track is not only dangerous but illegal.



A train can extend three or more feet on either side of the steel rail.<sup>10</sup> Never stand alongside the tracks.



A motorist is 40 times more likely to die in a crash involving a train than in a collision involving another motor vehicle.<sup>11</sup>



It takes a typical tractor-trailer unit at least 14 seconds to clear a single track and more than 15 seconds to clear a double track.<sup>12</sup>

## Prevention

To avoid potentially dangerous encounters with trains at railroad crossings, there are several simple yet life-saving practices to follow:

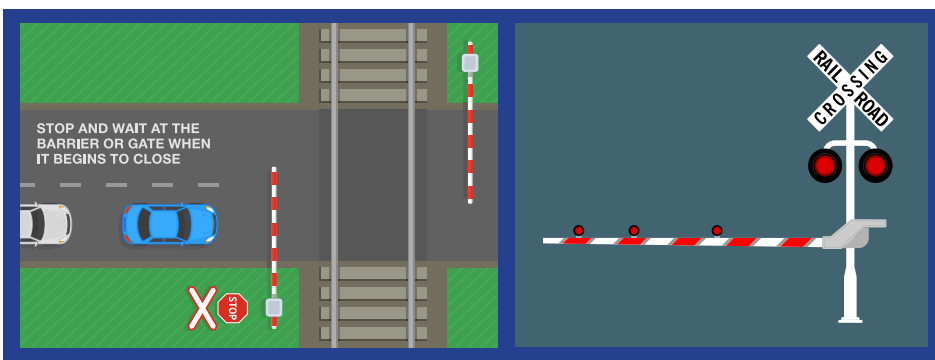
- **Slow down** when approaching a railroad crossing.
- **Look both ways TWICE** before crossing a railroad track.
- **Never engage in a race with a train** to cross the tracks.
- **Keep a minimum distance of 15 feet** from the tracks when stopped.
- **Stay alert for vehicles that are required to stop at railroad crossings**, such as school buses or trucks carrying hazardous materials.
- **Listen for whistles or bells** when approaching a crossing. Lower your windows and turn off the radio or air conditioner.
- **Always yield to railroad crossing warning devices** such as flashing lights, whistles, closing gates, crossbucks, or stop signs.
- **Shift gears before reaching the railroad crossing**, avoiding gear changes while on the tracks.
- **Cross the tracks only at designated crossings.** Use a crossing only if you are certain that your vehicle can clear the railroad crossing without stopping.
- **Do not be deceived** by the optical illusion of a moving train. It is always moving faster and closer than it appears.



## Stalled Vehicle

If you find yourself driving into a railroad crossing and the gate behind you descends, continue driving, even if it means breaking the crossing gate ahead of you. Never attempt to drive around a downed crossing gate. If you suspect a malfunction, promptly contact your local law enforcement or the railroad company. You can usually find the company's emergency contact number, along with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Inventory Crossing Number on the crossbuck post (six numbers and a letter) that identifies your location.

It is your responsibility to avoid a train since it cannot avoid you. Always [Look-Listen-Live](#). Stopping at a railroad crossing may add seconds to your journey but years to your lifetime. Remember to practice safety. Do not learn it by accident.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Augenstein, Neil. "Safety official: A person or vehicle is hit by a train every 3 hours, half by drivers dodging gates." Interview with Jennifer DeAngelis. Website. <https://wtop.com/local/2022/09/safety-official-a-person-or-vehicle-is-hit-by-a-train-every-3-hours-half-by-drivers-dodging-gates/>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>2</sup> Operation Lifesaver, "Collisions & Casualties by Year." Website. <https://oli.org/track-statistics/collisions-casualties-year>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>3</sup> Operation Lifesaver, "Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Collisions-Top 25 States." Website. <https://oli.org/track-statistics/collisions-casualties-year>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
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- <sup>5</sup> Federal Railroad Administration, "Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Fact Sheet." Website. <https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2019-11/FRA%20Highway-Rail%20Grade%20Crossing%20Safety%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>6</sup> Federal Railroad Administration, "Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Fact Sheet." Website. <https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2019-11/FRA%20Highway-Rail%20Grade%20Crossing%20Safety%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>7</sup> Augenstein, Neil. "Safety official: A person or vehicle is hit by a train every 3 hours, half by drivers dodging gates." Interview with Jennifer DeAngelis. Website. <https://wtop.com/local/2022/09/safety-official-a-person-or-vehicle-is-hit-by-a-train-every-3-hours-half-by-drivers-dodging-gates/>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>8</sup> Connecticut Department of Transportation, "Operation Lifesaver." Website. [https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/PP\\_Policy/Documents/OLSAFETY](https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/PP_Policy/Documents/OLSAFETY). Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>9</sup> Union Pacific, "11 Train Facts that Could Save Your Life." Website. <https://www.up.com/customers/track-record/tr092121-train-facts-rail-safety-week.htm#:~:text=Fact%20%234%3A%20Trains%20Can%20Stop,stop%20in%20time%2C%20think%20again>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>10</sup> Union Pacific, "11 Train Facts that Could Save Your Life." Website. <https://www.up.com/customers/track-record/tr092121-train-facts-rail-safety-week.htm#:~:text=Fact%20%234%3A%20Trains%20Can%20Stop,stop%20in%20time%2C%20think%20again>. Accessed September 1, 2023.
- <sup>11</sup> Strasburg Railroad, "Railroad Safety Tips All People Should Know." Website. <https://www.strasburgrailroad.com/blog/railroad-safety-tips/#:~:text=A%20motorist%20involved%20in%20a,soda%20can%20and%20a%20car>. Accessed May 22, 2025.
- <sup>12</sup> Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, "Commercial Drivers License Manual: Section 2.15, Railroad-Highway Crossings." Webpage. [https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/sites/fmcsa.dot.gov/files/docs/Commercial\\_Drivers\\_License\\_Manual\\_Railroad\\_Crossing\\_Section.pdf](https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/sites/fmcsa.dot.gov/files/docs/Commercial_Drivers_License_Manual_Railroad_Crossing_Section.pdf). Accessed September 1, 2023.



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