

Operation Lifesaver Overview

Stats:

- In 2004, there were 237 collisions between trains and motor vehicles at highway/railways crossings in Canada.
- The result was 25 deaths and 50 persons seriously injured.
- In addition, there were 99 incidents involving trespassing, resulting in 67 fatalities and 34 serious injuries.
- 22 of these collisions and trespassing incidents occurred in Manitoba and resulted in 4 deaths and 6 serious injuries.
- Canada-wide, the direct and indirect costs of these incidents amount to several million dollars annually.



Operation Lifesaver's success lies in educating people of all ages about the dangers of highway/railway crossings and the seriousness of trespassing on railway property.

These numbers reflect serious injuries, permanent disabilities, deaths, and extensive property damage. The great tragedy lies in the fact that virtually all of these incidents could have been avoided. The 2000 Summary of Railway Accidents/Incidents, a Transportation Safety Board of Canada publication, indicated that 64 per cent of collisions at public crossings occurring that year took place at crossings equipped with warning devices such as lights and bells.

Rail collisions are one of the most predictable of all transportation hazards. A highway/railway crossing has a precise location – the intersection of the highway and the railway track – where a collision between a motor vehicle and a train is most likely to occur.

Investigative reports often reveal that, in most circumstances, motorists are responsible for motor vehicle/rail collisions. They disregard the horn and bell warnings of approaching trains; they ignore light and bell warnings at crossings; and, sometimes they even drive around lowered gates.

It is less clear why people trespass on railway property, however studies have shown that trespassing incidents often take place when people walk, lie down, cross or sit on the tracks. Recreational vehicle users, cross-country skiers and hunters are also sometimes victims of collisions with trains.

Findings such as these indicate that, despite the installation of gates, other warning devices, pedestrian crossovers and

stricter trespassing enforcement, there is a lack of knowledge about the hazards that railways present. This communication gap is part of the problem and clearly, is part of the solution.

What is Operation Lifesaver?

Operation Lifesaver was established in 1981 in response to concerns regarding the needless loss of life, injuries and damage caused by highway/railway crossing and trespassing incidents. The Railway Transport Committee of the (then) Canadian Transport Commission joined forces with the railway companies as well as with provincial and municipal governments to develop and maintain aggressive programs to improve railway-related safety.

Operation Lifesaver is sponsored by The Railway Association of Canada and Transport Canada and works in co-operation with the Canada Safety Council and provincial safety councils/leagues. Operation Lifesaver is an active and continuing public education program designed to heighten general public awareness of the potential hazards of highway/railway crossings and to urge caution by drivers and pedestrians when in their vicinity. The program also seeks to inform the public of the dangers associated with trespassing on railway property. The goal is to reduce the number of incidents that result in fatalities, injuries, and monetary losses.

Operation Lifesaver is guided by a National Operation Lifesaver Advisory Committee, which provides advice to the national director regarding the develop-

ment and implementation of the program. This Advisory Committee is chaired by representatives of Transport Canada and the Railway Association of Canada. The other members of the committee include representatives from Transport Canada, the Canada Safety Council, CN, Canadian Pacific Railway, VIA Rail Canada Inc., the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Sûreté du Québec, a First Nations representative, a representative for Education, the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC), the United Transportation Union (UTU) and a representative from the provincial safety councils/leagues.

Program parameters

The four areas of concentration within Operation Lifesaver are:

(1) Education

Operation Lifesaver's success lies in educating people of all ages about the dangers of highway/railway crossings and the seriousness of trespassing on railway property. The methods used to reach the public include the production and distribution of educational related material, early elementary and driver education curriculum activities, civic presentations, as well as media coverage.

(2) Enforcement

Laws are in place governing motorists' and pedestrians' rights and responsibilities at highway/railway crossings and on railway property. Without enforcement, however, they will be ignored and disregarded, and

incidents will continue to occur. Provincial and municipal law enforcement agencies are urged to deal with motorists and pedestrians who disregard these laws and jeopardize their lives as well as the lives of others.

(3) Engineering

Highway/railway crossings, railway property and pedestrian crossings must be kept safe, both physically and operationally, and improvements must be made when needed. To ensure a high level of safety, the administrative process of improving railway rights-of-way needs to be reviewed and changed when needed. At the same time, the public needs to be made more aware of federal, provincial and other programs aimed at improving railway safety.

(4) Evaluation

To maintain the quality of Operation Lifesaver, its effect should be measured against its stated goals. Such evaluation is to be performed under the supervision of the national director. Funds are available for technical and program assistance.

In Manitoba, Operation Lifesaver utilizes presenters for public education purposes. Spring and summer events include: The Teddy Bear's Picnic in Winnipeg as well as the Children's Festival. There are also plans to have an interactive kiosk for children at the Children's Museum by spring 2005. As well, Operation Lifesaver presenters attend day camps when invited. There are currently plans to simulate a highway/railway collision in rural Manitoba in the summer of 2005. This provides educational purposes both for the students viewing the situation and for the responders, including fire, police, medical and other emergency personnel.

April 25-May1, 2005 is Railway Safety Awareness Week. Across Canada, municipalities will be working with railway companies and all levels of government to educate the public regarding how to prevent incidents involving railways. In Manitoba, presentations will be made in schools and a display will be set up in Winnipeg Malls. Schools interested in having a presentation made at any time of the year should contact the Manitoba Safety Council. ☎

For more information contact:
The Manitoba Safety Council
#3 -1680 Notre Dame Ave
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 1H6
Toll Free: 1-800-661-3321
Ph: (204) 949-1085
Fax: (204) 956- 2897
Email: tbozyk@mbsafety.org
Web: www.mbsafety.org



Railway Safety Awareness Week

April 25
to May 1
2005

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