

# Dept. of Transportation: Rail safety efforts aim to avoid preventable crashes

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A safe rail industry relies on road users to avoid serious crashes and keep trains moving smoothly through more than 4,000 public rail crossings across the state.

About a dozen people are hurt in train related crashes every year in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin State Patrol's September Law of the Month is [Rail Crossing Safety](#) to remind drivers and other road users to remain alert to avoid those preventable tragedies.

"Disregarding rail crossing signals and trespassing on railroad property is illegal and can have devastating consequences. Crashes between vehicles and trains are often severe and lead to greater injury or even death. We ask all road users to be aware of their surroundings and make good decisions when traveling near tracks," State Patrol Superintendent Tim Carnahan said.

## **Navigating rail crossings**

Every three hours a person or vehicle is hit by a train in the U.S., according to Operation Lifesaver, and more than 60% of collisions occur at rail crossings equipped with lights or gates.

Trains are so large that they cannot make sudden stops to prevent a crash, so drivers and pedestrians must be alert when approaching railroad crossings.

Freight trains don't have fixed schedules and can be seen any time of day. Always expect a train at rail intersections.

Drivers must follow all warning signs and signals, and should keep these things in mind:

- [State law](#) prohibits drivers from going around lowered crossing gates or crossing closely to an approaching train. At ungated crossings, drivers should look for trains even when there are no warning lights activated.
- Make sure you have enough room to get safely across the tracks. Sometimes in heavier traffic, a vehicle can get stuck in the middle of a crossing, which is very dangerous.
- Do not stop on the tracks. When waiting for a crossing train, stay back behind the painted lines on the road.
- Stay alert and put the phone down. Distractions while driving can prevent you from seeing or hearing an approaching train.

Pedestrians and bicyclists should also be particularly vigilant around train tracks to stay safe:

- Never walk or ride around lowered crossing gates. Wait for the train to pass and the gates to lift.
- Cross train tracks only at designated pedestrian or roadway crossings and obey all warning signs and signals posted there.
- Train tracks and rail yards are private property. Never walk on tracks. [It is illegal](#) and dangerous to trespass on rail property.
- A train can extend three feet or more beyond the rail, putting the safety zone for pedestrians well beyond the three-foot mark.
- If there are rails on the railroad ties, always assume the track is in use, even if there are weeds or the track looks unused.

### **Awareness and enforcement efforts**

Rail Safety Week is September 18-24, 2023. The weeklong effort is a partnership between law enforcement agencies and Operation Lifesaver, to encourage people to make safe decisions around railroad tracks and reduce the number of crashes

and injuries.

Wisconsin State Patrol officers will participate in Operation Clear Track, an enforcement and education effort focused on specific crossings with significant levels of train and vehicle traffic.

“Operation Clear Track is where we work with law enforcement agencies to educate motorists and pedestrians about being safe around railroad crossings,” said Gary Koerner, state coordinator for Wisconsin Operation Lifesaver. “We’re going to go all out and try to get that message out there that trains can be great to watch but stay far away. They’re very hazardous.”

Operation Clear Track will take place in communities across North America during Rail Safety Week.

View the September Law of the Month video and news release online: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/about-wisdot/newsroom/law/lom.aspx>