

Safety Article of the Month

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Railroad Crossing Safety Tips

Trains do not run on set schedules.

They can be on any track, at any time, going in either direction. When locomotive engineers see a vehicle or person on the tracks in the path of their train, they can only sound the warning horn and apply the emergency brakes. A train in emergency braking will stop, but not in time to avoid this collision. The average freight train consisting of 100 cars and weighing anywhere from 12 million to 20 million pounds takes over a mile to stop in emergency braking. There are brakes on every wheel, but it takes that long for all of those brakes to overcome the momentum of the tremendous weight pushing the train.

Always yield the right of way to the train.

The train cannot yield to you. More than half of all motor vehicle-train collisions occur at crossings equipped with the automatic signals. It's because some drivers choose to drive around the gates or through the flashing red lights because they believe they can beat the train, or they assume a stopped train has activated the signals or the signals are malfunctioning.

Never ignore active warnings at crossings.

Locomotives are huge; 17 feet high and 10 feet wide. As a result, they appear to be traveling much slower than we think when viewed from a slight angle at the crossing. The combination of the size and angle create this illusion. The parallel lines of the rails converging toward the horizon contribute to the illusion and fool our minds into thinking the train is farther away than it actually is. It is virtually impossible to accurately judge the speed of a train when these combinations of illusions are present.

Before starting across the tracks, be sure there's room to get completely across.

Many crossings are on a surface higher than the roadway. Shifting gears with a manual transmission while going across this raised surface may cause the vehicle to stall on the tracks. If your vehicle is ever stalled or trapped on the tracks and a train is approaching, quickly get yourself and all other passengers out! Don't try to take any other items with you. When the train strikes the vehicle it will send flying metal and glass ahead of and outward from the locomotive. Many people have been seriously injured and even killed because they ran the wrong direction.

When crossing has more than one track, don't try to cross immediately after the end of the train passes.

There may be another train approaching on the second track. Many crossing crashes have resulted because of impatience or inattentiveness at multiple-track crossings. You will always know how many tracks are at the crossing by observing a sign posed under the cross buck. Directly below the cross buck is a sign that indicates the number of tracks present if there are multiple tracks at the crossing.

Cross Railroad tracks at the correct angle.

Attack them from a perpendicular angle—cross them at 90 degrees to the way they run, or as close as you can to that. This may mean you need to swerve in your lane, cross the tracks, and then swerve back. Slow before the tracks, and then gas it as you cross. You'll lighten the front end so you maintain more steering authority, and the tracks won't grab the front wheel.

References:

Indiana Department of Transportation: Railroad Crossing Safety Tips.
Cycle World: How to Cross Railroad Tracks on Your Motorcycle.



Railroad Crossing with Stop and Cross buck signs



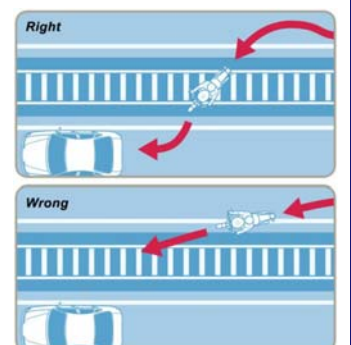
Diesel Locomotive



Railroad Crossing with Cantilever Flashing Lights and Gates



Multiple tracks Railroad Crossing



Railroad tracks attack angle.