



DRIVER SAFETY LETTER



Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety

March 2023

One of the initiatives the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to save lives on the nation's highways is to intensify the focus on highway-rail grade crossing safety. The FMCSA has launched a nationwide educational campaign to remind commercial motor vehicle drivers of the precautions they must take at highway-rail grade crossings.

A highway-rail grade crossing is an intersection where a roadway crosses railroad tracks at the same level or grade. Such crossings may be encountered on both public and private roads. There are more than 250,000 of these crossings in the U.S.

The number of highway rail crossing collisions, deaths, and injuries has dropped significantly over the past five decades. The number of train and motor vehicle collisions has declined from a high of nearly 12,000 annual incidents in 1972 to approximately 2,200 incidents in 2019, the last year for which figures are available.

Although the highway safety picture has improved considerably over the last decade, it's still startling that about every three hours, a person or vehicle is hit by a train. And people are killed every year and more than are injured at grade crossings—making this a still important safety initiative. Of all the highway-rail grade crossing incidents annually, around 500 involve trucks or tractor-trailers. This translates to an average of about 10 per week. Although collisions involving buses at grade crossings are infrequent, results of such incidents can be tragic.

Most, if not all of these incidents, can be prevented following these simple rules:

1. **Approach with care.** Warn others that you are slowing down. Turn on 4-way flashers. Use pull-out lane if available.
2. **Prepare to stop.** Turn off fans and radio and roll down windows. Locate your cell phone for use in emergency.
3. **Look both ways and listen carefully.** Bend forward to see around mirrors and A-pillars.
4. **If it won't fit, don't commit. Do not enter a crossing unless you can drive completely through without stopping!** Remember, trains are wider than the track. Before you pull onto the track, make sure there is enough room on the other side of the back of your vehicle (and any overhanging cargo) to be at least 6 feet beyond the furthest rail.
5. **Look again.** Before you move, look again in both directions.
6. **Cross tracks with care.** Signal, watch for a safe gap, pull back onto the road if you used a pull-out lane. Use highest gear that will let you cross without shifting.
7. **Keep going once you start, even if lights start to flash or gates come down.**

And remember—when you see tracks—always expect a train.

The NPTC Monthly Driver Safety Letter, jointly sponsored by NPTC and [Centerline Drivers](#), is a Microsoft Word document that you can print out and post as is, if appropriate, or modify any way you wish to make it a better fit for your drivers, including adding your company logo. If you are already doing an in-house letter, you may find information here that you can cut and paste into your own letter. If you are interested in specific subjects, or have any comments/feedback, contact Tom Moore, CTP, at tmoore@nptc.org or (703)838-8898.