

2024

# Virginia Rail Safety Month

## Stakeholder Toolkit



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# Together, We Can Stop Train Tragedies

**Every three hours in the United States, a person or vehicle is hit by a train.**

While passenger rail provides a safe, reliable, and important transportation option, it's vital to know how to stay safe near railroad tracks.

Governor Youngkin has issued a Proclamation declaring September 1-30, 2024, Rail Safety Month in the Commonwealth to raise public awareness of the dangers of ignoring safety warnings at level crossing and trespassing on rail property to reduce avoidable deaths, injuries, and damage caused by incidents involving trains and citizens. In coordination with our partners, the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority is promoting educational opportunities and rail safety events throughout the Commonwealth this month.

We hope you will join us in spreading awareness of rail safety throughout the month of September via your website, social media, and other communication methods such as emails and/or newsletters. Together we can stop track accidents and save lives.

To help you get started we have put together a list of actions you can take to educate about rail safety and save lives. A toolkit with expanded resources is included.

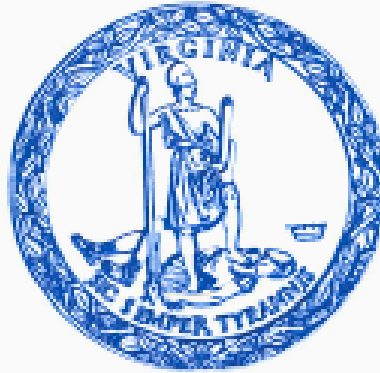


If you have any questions or would like to learn more about how you can support efforts to increase rail safety and save lives across Virginia, please contact:

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# Governor's Proclamation



## CERTIFICATE of RECOGNITION

*By virtue of the authority vested by the Constitution in the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, there is hereby officially recognized:*

### VIRGINIA RAIL SAFETY MONTH

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Virginia ranks nineteenth in the United States for miles of rails with 3,200 miles across the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, every three hours in the United States a person or vehicle is hit by a train; and

WHEREAS, nearly 2,200 highway-rail grade crossing collisions occurred in the United States in 2023, resulting in 247 fatalities and 757 injuries; and

WHEREAS, more than 60% of collisions occur at crossings equipped with lights and/or gates; and

WHEREAS, over 96% of all railroad fatalities occur from highway-rail grade crossing collisions and pedestrians trespassing on tracks; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Virginia has had a significant decrease in highway-rail grade crossing collisions ranking 26<sup>th</sup> in the United States down from 13<sup>th</sup> in 2021; and

WHEREAS, it is important for citizens to be aware of the dangers of ignoring safety warnings at level crossings and trespassing on rail property to reduce avoidable deaths, injuries, and damage caused by incidents involving trains and citizens;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Glenn Youngkin, do hereby recognize September 2024, as VIRGINIA RAIL SAFETY MONTH in the COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA, and I call this observance to the attention of all our citizens.



*Glenn Youngkin*  
Governor

*Kenny Lee*  
Secretary of the Commonwealth



# How to Participate

VPRA has compiled the following toolkit of content and resources to make communicating and engaging with your constituents/membership about Rail Safety Month simple and easy. Suggestions for ways to participate include:

- Adding a banner, splash page, or section to your website promoting Rail Safety Month and linking to the VPRA Rail Safety Month landing page (link provided in links section of the toolkit).
- Send an email about Rail Safety or include a section on Rail Safety in your monthly newsletter to your membership/constituents.
- Share and amplify VPRA's rail safety social media posts and/or create your own social posts with rail safety content tailored for your audiences.
- Promote and participate in Rail Safety Month activities hosted by VPRA and others (calendar of VPRA events included in toolkit).
- Include a brief statement about Rail Safety in your email signature for the month of September (sample language provided in toolkit).

**More than 2,300 people  
are injured or killed  
annually in railroad  
crossing and trespass  
incidents in North  
America.**

## Planned Outreach Events



September 1-30: Rail Safety Outreach and safety messaging at select schools in the Commonwealth

September 16: Staples Mill Station and Operation Lifesaver (OLI)

September 17: Alexandria Station

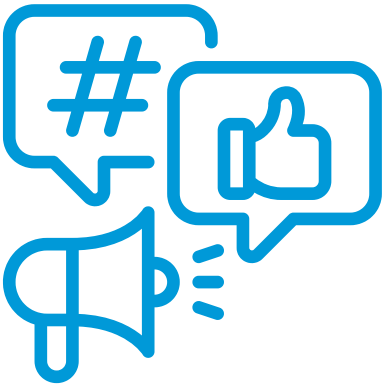
September 23 - 29: See Tracks? Think Train.<sup>®</sup> Week 2024

September 28 - Children's Museum of Richmond



# Sample Social Media Content

Throughout the month of September VPRA will be posting Rail Safety content on social media (@VaPassengerRail). Follow us and share our posts or create your own using the sample content below and graphics available at the following link: [Rail Safety Month Graphics](#).



- Think you'll hear a train? Think again! A train may be large, but it can come up behind you at high speed and with hardly a sound – until it's too late. #RailSafety
- Think you'll hear a train? Think again! Several hundred tons of metal traveling at high speed would seem impossible to go unnoticed, but this false assumption claims hundreds of lives every year. Don't be the next statistic. #RailSafetyWeek
- Think you'll hear a train? Think again! Train tracks, weather, and surrounding terrain can muffle sounds, making several hundred tons of steel quiet—and potentially deadly. #RailSafety
- Think you'll hear a train? Think again! You may hear a train rumble by while standing on a station platform. But when a train is moving directly towards you, it's barely audible – until it's too late. #RailSafety

**More than 60% of collisions occur at crossings equipped with lights and/or gates.**

## Links and Other Content

[VPRA Rail Safety Month Landing Page](#)

[Operation Lifesaver Rail Safety Education Materials](#) – a database of additional resources searchable by audience, topic, and media type (i.e., audio, video, pdf, etc.)



# General Rail Safety Tips

## Track Safety Basics

- Freight trains don't travel at fixed times, and schedules for passenger trains often change. Always expect a train at each highway-rail intersection at any time.
- All train tracks are private property. Never walk on tracks; it's illegal to trespass and highly dangerous. It takes the average freight train traveling at 55 mph more than a mile—the length of 18 football fields—to stop. Trains cannot stop quickly enough to avoid a collision.
- The average locomotive weighs about 400,000 pounds or 200 tons; it can weigh up to 6,000 tons. This makes the weight ratio of a car to a train proportional to that of a soda can to a car. We all know what happens to a soda can hit by a car.



- Trains have the right of way 100% of the time over emergency vehicles, cars, the police and pedestrians.
- A train can extend three feet or more beyond the steel 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.

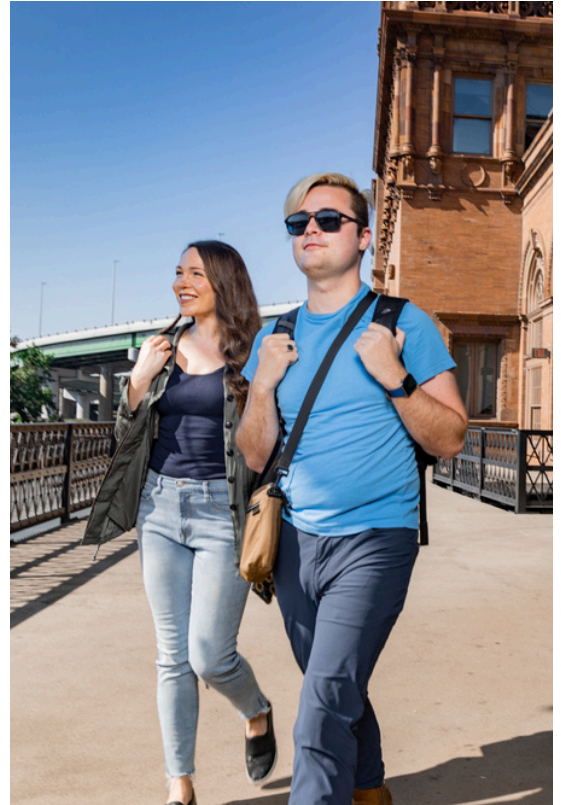
- Trains can move in either direction at any time. Sometimes its cars are pushed by locomotives instead of being pulled, which is especially true in commuter and light rail passenger service.
- Today's trains are quieter than ever, producing no telltale "clackety-clack." Any approaching train is always closer, moving faster, than you think.
- Remember to cross train tracks ONLY at designated pedestrian or roadway crossings and obey all warning signs and signals posted there.
- Stay alert around railroad tracks. Refrain from texting, headphones or other distractions that would prevent you from hearing an approaching train; never mix rails and recreation.



# Pedestrian Safety Tips

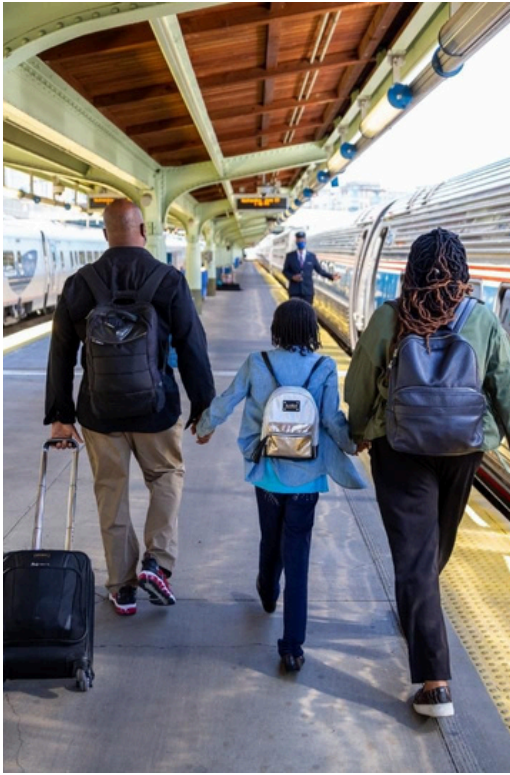
When walking, jogging, or riding through railroad crossings, it's important to know what to do when you see railroad signs and signals. Stay alert at places where the roadway crosses train tracks.

- Always expect a train. Trains are quieter and faster than you think, can run on any track, at any time, from either direction, and do not run on set schedules.
- Walking on or beside railroad tracks is illegal.
- The only safe place to cross tracks is at designated public crossings with a crossbuck, flashing red lights or a gate. Crossing anywhere else is illegal.
- Crossing tracks on a bike, with a stroller, in a wheelchair, or on other narrow wheels requires caution and extra attention. Plan ahead when choosing a route. When possible, walk, don't ride across the tracks. Cyclists, walk your bike across train tracks at a 90-degree angle. If in a wheelchair, consider getting assistance or taking an alternate route.
- Never pass flashing lights or go around lowered gates. Always wait until lights have stopped flashing and gates are completely raised.
- Wait to cross until you can see clearly in both directions. Multiple tracks may mean multiple trains.
- Stay off railroad bridges and trestles. Stay out of railroad tunnels. There is ONLY ROOM for the train.
- Do not attempt to hop aboard railroad equipment at any time. Trains, tracks and railroad yards are NOT playgrounds. Never climb on, under or through railroad cars. Never jump on or off a train while it's moving.



**Find more safety tips at <https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/walking-safely-near-tracks>**

# Passenger Rail Safety Tips



- **STAY ALERT.** Trains can come from either direction at any time and can be very quiet. Around train tracks or in stations, obey all warning signs and signals and use caution when using headsets or cell phones.
  - **WATCH THE OVERHANG.** Trains are wider than the tracks; never sit on the edge of a station platform.
  - **STAND AWAY FROM THE PLATFORM EDGE.** Pay attention to painted or raised markings at the platform edge and stay at least three feet from the train while it is coming in or out of the station.
  - **WHEN ON BOARD, HOLD ON.** Hold on tight to poles or seats and listen carefully to directions from the train operator or conductor.
  - **WATCH YOUR STEP.** Be careful getting on and off the train - there may be a gap between the train and platform or steps.
- 
- **DON'T TAKE SHORTCUTS WITH YOUR LIFE!** Follow directional signs and markings that let you know where it is safe to cross the tracks. Crossing the tracks anywhere else is dangerous and illegal.

Find more safety tips at  
<https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/passenger-and-transit-rail-safety>

**Trains are quieter and move faster than you think. They can run at any time, on any track in either direction.**



# KNOW THE SIGNS



## ADVANCE WARNING

Warns drivers that the road crosses railroad tracks ahead.  
Reminds the driver to slow down, look and listen for a train.

## ADVANCE WARNING Signs for side streets

Warns that a highway-rail intersections will appear immediately after making either a right or a left turn.  
Reminds the driver to be prepared to stop if a train is approaching.



## CROSSBUCK

Marks the crossing and should be considered the same as a YIELD.  
Most common sign at public highway-rail intersections.

## EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM (ENS)

Shows the railroad's emergency phone number and USDOT Crossing Number.

This is the first phone number to call if your car is stuck on the tracks; if it is missing call 911. Each crossing in the USA has a unique USDOT Crossing Number.



Learn more at <https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/track-safety-basics/rail-signs-and-signals>



# Safety Tips for First Responders

Train tracks are considered live, active tracks until there is confirmation from the railroad company that train traffic has been stopped. It's imperative for first responders and dispatchers to be aware that each crossing has a Blue and White ENS sign with a specific 800 number and crossing identification number. Railroad companies need to be notified immediately regarding anything on or near railroad tracks. On-scene responders should be prepared to give their dispatch the 800 number and crossing identification number in emergencies.

**Operation Lifesaver offers a Railroad Investigation and Safety Course (RISC) free of charge for first responders to teach safety techniques while responding to incidents on or near railroad tracks and how to maintain on-scene safety at a railroad incident.**

## Think Ahead, Approach with Caution, Look and Listen, Act Safely

- Slow down as you approach railroad crossings.
- Look and listen for a train. Multiple tracks may mean multiple trains. And remember trains can come from either direction.
- Make sure the railroad has been notified and that train activity has been stopped before personnel or equipment is allowed on or near the tracks. When responding near train tracks, park vehicles at least 15 feet from the nearest rail.
- Never park your vehicle on or near the tracks.
- Whether helping someone else, or if your vehicle is stuck or stalled on tracks, always get everyone out immediately.
- If a train is approaching, move away from the tracks at a 45-degree angle in the direction the train is approaching to avoid debris. Find the Blue and White ENS sign posted at or near the crossing. Call the number on the sign. Give the crossing identification number so the railroad knows your location. Report the problem.



Find more safety tips at  
<https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/additional-info/first-responders>



# Safety Tips for Professional/Commercial Drivers

Professional drivers have critical decisions to make at every turn. If a route includes railroad crossings, it's important to know what to do when you see railroad signs and signals. Help your members keep themselves and their equipment safe with these educational resources:

**PLAN AHEAD—Know your route and be aware of railroad crossings. Be prepared to look and listen for a train.**

## KNOW YOUR TRUCK SIZE

- If your vehicle won't fit, don't commit! Before crossing, be sure there is space to completely clear the tracks. Trains overhang tracks. When driving leave at least 15 feet between the front and rear of your vehicle and the nearest rail. Never stop on tracks.
- Use the highest gear which will let you cross the tracks without shifting.
- Track heights vary. If you drive a low clearance vehicle, be aware of raised crossings.

## STEPS TO SAFELY CROSS RAILROAD TRACKS

1. Eliminate all distractions. Turn off noisy fans and radios. Look and listen for a train.
2. Stop no closer than 15 feet and no farther than 50 feet from the crossing.
3. Look carefully in both directions for approaching trains twice before crossing. If necessary, look around visual obstructions. If your view is obstructed, do not attempt to cross.
4. Know the law. Trucks carrying hazardous materials are required to STOP at all crossings unless there is an exempt sign posted at the crossing.
5. Once you begin crossing the tracks, do not hesitate. Cross without stopping. If stuck or stalled on the tracks, evacuate immediately and call the number on the Blue and White sign. Give the crossing identification number so the railroad knows your location.

**Note: Refer to state and local laws and company policies for additional information.**



Find more safety tips at <https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/driving-safely-near-tracks/professional-drivers>



# Safety Tips for School Bus Drivers

School bus drivers play a critical role in ensuring the safety of children, especially when it comes to interacting with railroad tracks. Here are some best practices for maintaining railroad safety:

1. **Stopping at Railroad Crossings:** School buses are required to stop at all railroad crossings, regardless of whether there is a visible train. This is to ensure that the driver can check both directions for trains.
2. **Visibility and Signals:** Buses should use their hazard lights and, when necessary, activate the bus's stop arm and red lights to alert other vehicles and pedestrians of their presence.
3. **Checking for Trains:** Drivers must look and listen for trains before crossing. They should wait for the crossing gates to fully rise and for the lights and bells to stop before proceeding.
4. **Educating Students:** Drivers should teach students to stay seated and remain silent while the bus is at a railroad crossing. Students should also be instructed never to cross the tracks until the bus has completely cleared the crossing.



Source: Safety Training Excellence,  
<https://safetyvideos.org/product/railroad-crossing-procedures-for-school-bus-drivers/>

Find more safety tips at  
<https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/driving-safely-near-tracks/school-bus-drivers>



# Safety Tips for Cyclists

When riding through railroad crossings, it's important to know what to do when you see railroad signs and signals. Help your members stay safe with these educational resources:

## ONLY TRAINS BELONG ON THE TRACKS

- NEVER walk, jog or bike on railroad tracks, bridges and tunnels.
- Never try to cross on, under or climb through a stopped train. Railroad tracks, trestles, yards and equipment are private property and being on them is trespassing. It's illegal. You can lose your life or be seriously injured, fined or arrested.

1. Always expect a train. Trains are quieter and faster than you think, can run on any track, at any time, from either direction, or on a schedule.
2. The only safe place to cross tracks is at designated public crossings with a crossbuck, flashing red lights or a gate. Crossing anywhere else is illegal.
3. Crossing tracks on a bike, requires caution and extra attention. Plan ahead when choosing a route. When possible, walk, don't ride across the tracks.
4. Walk your bike across train tracks at a 90 degree angle.
5. Never pass flashing lights or go around lowered gates. Always wait until lights have stopped flashing and gates are completely raised.
6. Wait to cross until you can see clearly in both directions. Multiple tracks may mean multiple trains.
7. Stay off railroad bridges and trestles. Stay out of railroad tunnels. There is ONLY ROOM for the train.



**Find more safety tips at <https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/walking-safely-near-tracks>**



# Safety Tips for Farmers and Machine Operators

Farmers and Farm Machine Operators may encounter a variety of railroad crossings as they go about their work in the field. Help your members keep themselves and their equipment safe with these educational resources:

## DON'T LOSE YOUR LOAD OR YOUR LIFE!

- Check hitch pins to ensure they cannot dislodge while crossing and that your load is secure, so materials are not dislodged onto train tracks while crossing.
- AVOID tips and spills by making sure that farm machinery wheels are properly lined up with the railroad crossing surface. Stop no closer than 15 feet from the crossing and leave at least 15 feet between the front and rear of your vehicle and the nearest rail.
- Be aware that liquids or top-heavy grain wagons are prone to tipping.

**If you don't fit, don't commit!  
Make sure your equipment  
can completely clear the  
railroad tracks before  
starting across.**

## STEPS TO SAFELY CROSS RAILROAD TRACKS

1. Slow down as you approach a railroad crossing. Be prepared to stop.
2. Stop no closer than 15 feet from the crossing.
3. Look and Listen for a train! You may not hear a train horn. Open cab windows and remove all distractions (i.e., turn off radio and fan, remove headphones, etc.). Rock back and forth in your seat to see around obstacles.
4. Once you begin crossing the tracks, do not hesitate. Cross without stopping. If stuck or stalled on the tracks, evacuate immediately and call the number on the Blue and White sign. Give the crossing identification number so the railroad knows your location.

**Find more safety tips at  
<https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/driving-safely-near-tracks/farmers-and-farm-machine-operators>**



# Safety Tips for Photographers



No photo is worth the risk. Photo and video shoots on or near railroad tracks are illegal and dangerous. Help your members keep themselves and their clients safe with these educational resources:

## **NO PHOTO IS WORTH THE RISK!**

- Each year, hundreds of people are injured or killed while trespassing on railroad property in the U.S.
- Trains are faster and quieter than you think.
- Railroad tracks, bridges, trestles and yards are private property.
- You can be held liable for damage, injury or worse.
- It can take over one mile, or 18 football fields, for a train to come to a complete stop. Trains can't stop quickly, and they can't swerve!
- Sharing photos taken on or near the tracks might promote dangerous, illegal behavior.



Find more safety tips at <https://oli.org/safety-near-trains/walking-safely-near-tracks/photographer-and-filmmaker-safety>