

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #17

Safe driving procedures at railroad crossings

Signs, signals, and gates are installed at railroad crossings for safety. Unfortunately, sometimes these controls are not obeyed, and the consequence is sometimes a fatal crash. A study of rural railroad crossings has shown that 67 percent of drivers cross the tracks when warning lights are used, and 38 percent of drivers drive around lowered crossing gates. In 1998, there were 104 crashes at highway-railroad crossings in Iowa, resulting in three fatalities and 30 personal injuries.

Understanding the signs and signals

Drivers can help reduce the number of crashes and fatalities at railroad crossings by recognizing the signs, signals, and gates described below and obeying the law:



Advance warning signs (see figure above) are placed in advance of railroad crossings and alert drivers to a crossing.



Railroad crossing (or crossbuck) signs (see figure above) are normally located within 12 feet of the crossing and identify the crossing location to motorists.

Alternately flashing lights are used to warn motorists that a train is present or approaching. Drivers should stop and wait until the lights stop flashing before looking in both directions and proceeding.

A **descending gate arm** that extends across the approaching lanes of traffic is sometimes used to block traffic at the crossing.

OTHER TIPS

Operation Lifesaver, a nationwide public education program dedicated to reducing crashes at rail crossings, gives some additional tips for drivers at railroad crossings:

- Never race a train to a crossing.
- Never drive around lowered gates.
- Watch for a second train when crossing multiple tracks.
- Expect a train at any time; trains do not always follow set schedules.
- *Be aware that trains cannot stop quickly*—it takes over a mile to stop the train once emergency brakes are applied, so when a train engineer can see you it is too late to avoid a crash.
- Get out of your vehicle if it stalls on a crossing and call local law enforcement for assistance; only attempt to restart your vehicle if you can have someone warn of approaching trains.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.