

CUSTOMER FOCUS ON LOSS CONTROL

NUMBER 25

Railroad Crossing Safety

There is a lesson to be learned from the tragic school bus accident which occurred in Chicago in October, 1995. Due to a traffic light at an intersection positioned just beyond a rail crossing, a school bus which had stopped for the light did not completely clear the tracks, and was struck by an oncoming train, killing several students. Railroad crossings continue to be extremely hazardous—even when they are "protected" with flashing lights and crossing barriers. The final responsibility of making a safe crossing *must* rely on the proper action of the vehicle's driver. Whether your vehicle's cargo is students, gasoline, chemicals, valuable commodities, or 'just' yourself, trains never come out "second best"—*you do*.

The *only* way to win at a railroad crossing is to not be on the tracks at the same time the train is there. Many cities and towns have crossings similar to that at the Chicago accident scene, where a signal light is found just beyond the crossing. As a driver, you must evaluate the need to use that particular crossing versus a crossing which holds a lesser hazard. Better routing may remove all of the risk. Whenever you approach a railroad grade crossing, *always* evaluate it to determine if you can cross the tracks *completely* without having to stop partially across the rails. Determine if a traffic control device (signal light or stop sign) is far enough *past* the tracks to provide ample stopping room for *your* vehicle.

What are the proper defensive driving steps to use when approaching a railroad crossing?

- *Slow down and look down the track in both directions.* Don't depend on signals to warn you of an approaching train. Reduce your speed so you can safely see the track in both directions, especially when your vision is obstructed by buildings, terrain, trees and bushes, or other vehicles.
- When slowing down, *evaluate traffic behind your vehicle* by using your mirrors, to make sure they will not rear-end you.
- *Listen* for approaching trains and their warning devices.
- *Look for a sign indicating that there are multiple tracks*, which can present multiple hazards.
- *Wait to proceed across the track(s)* until you have enough room to clear the track completely on the opposite side.
- *Do not shift gears while crossing the tracks.*
- If your vehicle has limited road clearance underneath, and you are crossing an elevated track, *evaluate the potential for getting "hung up"* as you cross.
- If you have to stop behind another vehicle just after crossing the tracks, *leave enough room between vehicles* so you can maneuver around it if necessary, to provide additional rear clearance with the tracks.
- *Always be alert* for potential approaching trains, and be ready to take necessary evasive action.

Leave yourself an out.

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