

Saving Lives at America's Highway-Rail Crossings and along Railroad Rights of Way.

From the State Coordinator *Fred Hirsch*

Statistics 2009

Take a look at the 20-year graph in the bottom right corner of this page. The statistics on crashes and trespasser injuries and deaths, comparable to last year, still pale in comparison to many other states.



I have a friend who asks why Maine even needs an Operation Lifesaver organization if there are hardly any crashes or trespasser casualties each year over the past several years. The answer is clear: Maine Operation Lifesaver doesn't ramp up its efforts based on the number of incidents; rather we're out there saving lives through awareness and prevention *before* a tragedy occurs. To that end, how do we count *how many* lives we saved in a year? Did a driver's ed student we reached warn her parent at the wheel not to drive around lowered gates? Did a firefighter think twice about racing across the tracks to a scene when he clearly saw a train way down the tracks?

Most of my state coordinator colleagues around the country can only wish for the unofficial statistics we tally each year. Consider that states like Illinois, Indiana, Texas, and Louisiana among others chalk up 100 and more incidents annually. Even a state as close as Massachusetts has to deal with many more crashes and trespass injuries than here in Maine. Yes, Maine sees fewer and slower trains than in most parts of the United States. Still, as noted many times, train crews almost daily see those "near misses."

For every crash or rail trespass injury, we lose. For every child and adult we reach, we win.

2009 train-vehicle collisions, trespass casualties remain low

Unofficially, according to information gathered by Maine Operation Lifesaver, for the second year in a row there were four reportable incidents at railroad crossings and along the state's more than 1,100 miles of active tracks.

One train-vehicle collision resulted in two minor injuries and in the other there was no injury to those in the vehicle. The two trespass casualties were serious, but not fatal. Interestingly, two of the noted incidents – one crash and one trespass injury – occurred in one community.

Responding to a rail incident

While Maine Operation Lifesaver has over the years educated firefighters, law enforcement officers, and ambulance crews about the dangers at railroad crossings while driving to and arriving at a scene on or near railroad tracks, a new program expands the reach to emergency responders.

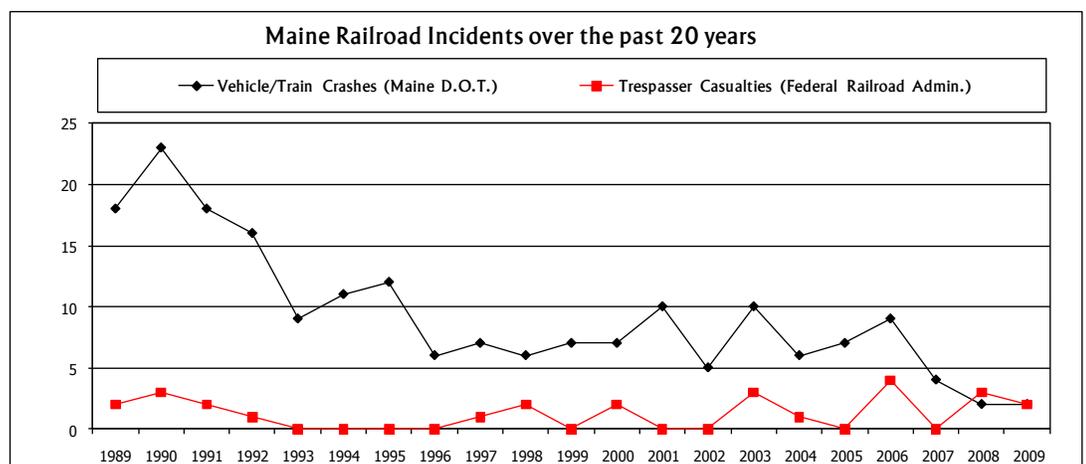
Rail Safety for Emergency Responders, or RSER, is taught by certified O/L volunteers who have spent hours in training specifically for such a course. A portion of that classroom includes the Operation Lifesaver rail safety message. Last year in Maine, 335 responders learned about approaching a train derailment or hazardous material leak from a railroad car. Responders attended classes held in Old Orchard Beach, South Portland, Gorham, Winthrop, Ellsworth, Bangor, Brownville Junction, Richmond, and Waterville. Interestingly enough, one of the smallest communities, Brownville Junction where two rail lines meet, drew the largest class – 60 participants!

2009's new certified presenters

Three new presenters joined the Maine Operation Lifesaver ranks in 2009. Mari Smith is with the Freeport Police Department; Jason Birkel and Josh Eichel are both with the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad, based in Auburn.

For more information, to obtain educational material, or to arrange for a free safety presentation, go to www.maineol.org, e-mail at info@maineol.org, call (207) 827-7367, or write to Maine Operation Lifesaver, 23 Park Street, Old Town, Maine 04468

Maine Railroad Incidents over the past 20 years



New distribution location for O/L material

Thanks goes out to the Great Falls Model Railroad Club in Auburn for hosting Operation Lifesaver educational supplies at its new Auburn location. Club members, including Maine O/L volunteers Jay Calnan and Paul Lodge, have reserved a section of the facility to make it more convenient to get material out to volunteers in southern Maine.



Giveaway material awaits distribution from new center.

One-on-one with Maine principals

It was up close and personal between our volunteers and public and private school principals and assistant principals at last fall's Maine Principals Association conference held in Portland. An Operation Lifesaver exhibit was not inexpensive as a paid vendor, but it was agreed meeting so many school officials at one location was well worth it. As a result, 20 presentations were booked while many other principals and their assistants learned more from volunteers Norma Griffiths and Paul Lodge about rail safety and will hopefully ask for presentations in the future.



Kiosks refreshed at Amtrak stations

One small way Maine Operation Lifesaver gets its rail safety message out is through glass-enclosed kiosks at Amtrak stations along the Downeaster route in Maine and New Hampshire. Amtrak detective and Operation Lifesaver volunteer Mike Lee is also caretaker for the kiosks at Maine and New Hampshire stations and last year updated the messages with new posters.



One poster depicts a truck driver, the other a school bus driver, about to cross tracks with a train oncoming and heralding, "Don't let this be the last thing you never saw." A third poster shows teens walking the tracks with headphone devices and a train barreling down on them with the headline, "Deadly shortcuts....Grave results."

PSAs will dramatize dangers of distracted driving

The Operation Lifesaver national office was busy producing and distributing new videos and public service announcements (PSAs) in 2009. The latest is a series of 30-second hard-hitting PSAs drawing together the hot issue of distracted driving with approaching a railroad crossing. It's planned the new PSAs will be distributed to broadcast stations in Maine with hopes for frequent play. They will also be featured on Maine Operation Lifesaver's website.

Those Reached Through O/L Presentations...

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Driver Education Students	132	250	251	314	213	206
Driver Education Instructors	8	0	0	0	56	0
Professional Drivers	172	84	455	200	66	0
Law Enforcement, EMS	180	202	200	101	123	510
School Bus Drivers	58	1213	43	141	277	70
Students (preschool - 12)	1161	3970	5102	1038	2376	1487
ATV, Snowmobile, Hunter Safety	0	0	0	0	969	35
Civic Groups, others	364	349	567*	338	212	231
TOTALS	2075	6068	6618	2132	4292	2539

*Includes teachers at school presentation not reported in past years.

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Events/exhibits where Maine Operation Lifesaver participated in 2009

Oakfield Railfan Day	Maine Health/Safety Conference
National Train Day, Bangor, Auburn	Lions Train Show, Augusta
Transportation Day at the Legislature	Maine Driver Education Conference, Bangor
National Emergency Numbers Conference, Auburn	Glenburn School Safety Fair
Third Railers Train Show, Augusta	Auburn Hall
Maine Principals Association, Portland	New Gloucester Safety Awareness Day
Topsham Train Show	Bangor Fire Department Open House
Maine DOT Wellness Day, Dixfield	Eastern Maine Model RR Show Club, Brewer
Great Falls Model RR Club show, Auburn	Lindbergh Crate Museum, Canaan
American Folk Festival, Bangor	Hampden Children's Day
Freeport Fire/Rescue Open House	Sanford Lions Train Show
Maine School Health Promotion Conference, Carrabasset Valley	



Auburn Mall Spring Fair Auburn Mall Fall Fair
Bucksport Bay Festival