

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

From the State Coordinator

Fred Hirsch

In the news item elsewhere on this page, Maine Operation Lifesaver has good reason to boast of the safest year in recent history and most likely the safest year ever



at railroad crossings. "Boast" may not be the proper term as there were four crashes – one of them fatal to the vehicle's driver. Because of the sheer size of a train compared to any vehicle, the other drivers involved in 2007's collisions must have had an angel on their shoulders as they escaped serious injury.

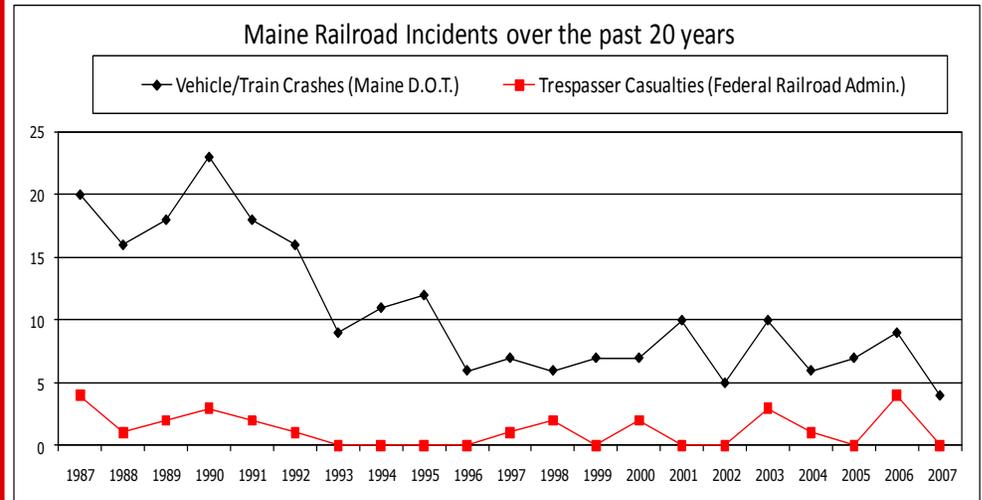
Little is said, however, about those at the head end of the trains. Imagine seeing a crash or a trespasser incident about to happen before your own eyes and not being able to do much about it, even if the millions of pounds you're shepherding is hundreds of yards away! Emergency brakes on and the horn blasting away and still it can't be avoided. Ask any engineer or conductor and he or she will tell you they see close calls nearly every day. Yes, almost every day.

Those near misses, as they're called, is why Maine Operation Lifesaver will remain active even if we get through the next year or year thereafter with even fewer crashes and trespass casualties. For all the adults and children touched each year by our safety message at schools, fairs, other gatherings and by way of the media, there are so many more who think they can beat the train at the crossing, believe the tracks are public property, or think they can outrun a train from the middle of a trestle. So, our mission continues.

Fewest Train-Vehicle Crashes Highlight 2007

The numbers tell the story and Maine Operation Lifesaver volunteers can take a good part of the credit. There were fewer train-vehicle crashes in Maine in 2007 than in recent history and probably the safest year ever. Four incidents at railroad crossings occurred where a vehicle crashed into an oncoming or stationary train. That compares to nine such collisions in 2006 at Maine's more than 900 public and private crossings. The figure is compiled from railroad officials and information from the Maine Department of Transportation. A look at the numbers on the graph below shows that since Maine Operation Lifesaver has kept statistics over the past 20 years, there has been a dramatic decrease in incidents. Credit must also go to Maine's railroads and the Maine Department of Transportation which partner with Maine Operation Lifesaver and the motoring public for their vigilance when approaching and crossing railroad tracks. The decrease in crashes comes at a time when the number of trains traveling through Maine and the number of vehicles on the roads have been increasing in recent years. Maine's statistics reflect a similar downturn nationwide in highway-train collisions.

Further good news in 2007 is reflected by the fact there were no trespass incidents resulting in injury or death. It compares favorably to 2006 when three incidents ultimately resulted in four deaths of individuals who were trespassing on private railroad property.



New Emphasis Targets Rail Trespassing

Over the past decade, both in Maine and nationwide, while train-vehicle collisions have gone down, trespass incidents have risen. Far more are now killed or seriously injured because they are illegally on railroad property rather than in their vehicles at railroad crossings.

Beginning in 2007, Operation Lifesaver certified presenters were asked to warn the public about the dangers of trespassing even if the primary audience is present to hear about crossing safety. Truck drivers are snowmobilers; school bus drivers are hunters; emergency responders are fishermen; and driver education students are hikers. Including the trespass prevention message to every person will remind them not only to yield at crossings, but also to stay off the tracks when taking in the great outdoors.

Popular Railroad Trading Cards Are Back

More of the Maine railroad trading cards – 27,000 more – were printed and began distribution in 2007. With the first issuance of the popular cards all but gone after one year, new cards were ordered with all new pictures of Maine railroad equipment representing the state's six railroads and Amtrak's Downeaster. You can see a larger picture of the cards on our website www.MaineOL.org under the Trading Cards 07 tab.



The messages on the backs of the cards remain the same, reminding youngsters of the dangers around railroad property. Included are tips on how to cross railroad tracks safely when riding a bicycle and warnings against walking, recreational vehicle riding, placing objects on the tracks, and hopping aboard a train among other dangerous activities. Also on the back side are postal and e-mail addresses and a phone number to arrange for a free Maine Operation Lifesaver presentation as well as a description of the railroad whose picture is featured.



Thanks go to the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority and HRH Northern New England for contributions towards the new cards which were matched with a grant from

Operation Lifesaver, Inc. The cards are given to children at schools, train shows, and other community events.



Maine O/L volunteer Len Mulligan (upper left photo) presents framed picture of the new trading cards to NNEPRA's Patricia Quinn while Norma Griffiths makes a similar presentation to HRH's Mike McInnis.

Maine O/L Meetings are Less Costly, More Efficient

Monthly Maine Operation Lifesaver meetings in 2007 became maybe a bit less personal, but a lot more efficient thanks to in-kind services offered by the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad and the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway. Through conference calling using the railroads' conferencing facilities, there has been better attendance when discussing Maine Operation Lifesaver business without the expense and time consumption of driving to meeting sites in Hermon, Auburn, Portland, Augusta, Waterville, and Rockland. While conference calls have been proven worthy, face-to-face meetings have an importance, too. Quarterly meetings in person are still being held throughout the state.



One of the dozens of Maine Operation Lifesaver presentations made in 2007



Another Record: 2007 Event Attendance

For the second straight year, Maine Operation Lifesaver volunteers outdid themselves staffing a record number of events. Two model train sets, two television/video players, and our caboose were being put to good use at events throughout 2007 while thousands of dollars in promotional rail safety material from brochures to trading cards and from key chains to pencils and wrist bands were given away. Here's where we made our presence known:

- Brunswick Naval Air Station Air Show (picture shown above)
- Scarborough Middle School Safety Fair
- American Folk Festival
- Waldo County Hospital Safety/Health Fair
- Brunswick Fire Department Open House
- New Gloucester Fire Department Fair
- McLaughlin Foundation Trees and Trains
- Auburn Social Club Train Show
- Rockland Kiwanis Truck Show
- Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington RR
- Sappi Paper Employee Appreciation
- Belfast & Moosehead Lake RR Anniversary
- Maine School Nurses Assn. Conference
- Kids Day America -- Scarborough
- So. Maine EMS Exposition
- Mast Landing School Health/Safety Fair
- Penquis Return-to-School event
- Maine Driver Education Conference
- Ellsworth Autumn Gold Days
- Maine Narrow Gauge RR Convention
- Maine Health/Safety Conference
- West Bath Fire Department Open House
- Whitefield Lions Train Show
- Maine DOT Conferences, Presque Isle, Bangor, Farmington, Portland
- Topsham Train Show
- Sanford Train Show
- Auburn Mall
- Brownville Day
- Richmond Day
- Warren Day
- Bath Police Safety Day
- W. Paris Old Home Days
- Seashore Trolley Museum
- Boothbay Village Railroad
- Hampden Children's Day
- Great Falls Model RR Show
- Three Railers Train Show
- UMaine Fort Kent Safety Fair
- Auburn Library Open House
- Little Dolphin Pre-School Fair

Those Reached Through O/L Presentations...

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Driver Education Students	825	794	301	132	250	251	314
Driver Education Instructors	0	11	23	8	0	0	0
Professional Drivers	153	308	0	172	84	455	200
Law Enforcement	0	54	33	57	98	65	24
Emergency Responders	935	0	168	123	104	135	77
School Bus Drivers	552	0	50	58	1213	43	141
Students (preschool - 12)	17472	570	5172	1161	3970	5102	1038
Civic Clubs, others	17	307	41	364	349	567*	338*
TOTALS	19954	2044	5788	2075	6068	6618	2132

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

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