

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

From the State Coordinator *Fred Hirsch*

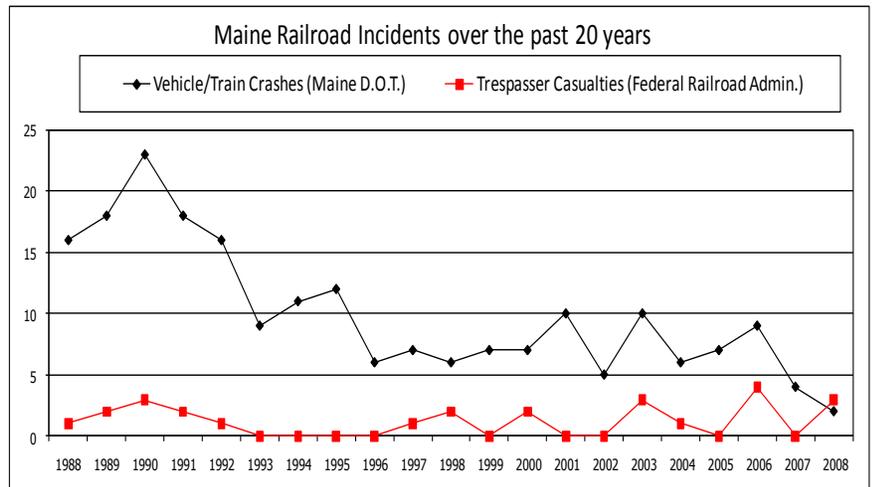


What Was *Not* Reported

As is the case nearly always, the best publicity for Maine Operation Lifesaver and its mission to warn the public of the dangers at rail crossings and on railroad property unfortunately is the aftermath of the worst tragedies. In 2008, such was the case when on a Spring day in May, two Maine teenagers were severely injured when struck by a train. The story led the TV and radio newscasts and was given lots of ink in the state's half dozen daily newspapers. We immediately sent out a news release expressing our regrets, but emphasized that a train can approach from either direction at any time and that railroad property is private property. The media coverage faded away after two days or so, but a couple of weeks later, the frenzy rekindled when a news conference convened at the hospital where the victims were recuperating. One teen was being released that day and the other was well on her way towards going home. Several of our volunteers who watched the newscasts and read the newspaper accounts of the news conference were a bit miffed at how broadcasters and the press reported the media event. The emphasis of the stories was how the victims had endured. They would stay as best friends, helping each other cope with their injuries. Their lives were returning to normal – back to school, being back with friends and family. Their mothers expressed thanks that their daughters had survived the ordeal. What was *not* reported and maybe never expressed by the girls during the news conference was their remorse over being on the tracks in the first place. That's the message we wanted to hear, of course, but did not. With the reputation often pinned upon the media of reporting only the bad news, maybe this was an opportunity to report a story with a happy ending. Maine Operation Lifesaver continues to appreciate our state's newspaper, TV, and radio coverage which helps spread our message as we see it. We can present the facts, but cannot dictate how they report it. We can only hope in this case that at dinner tables around the state, parents and their children were talking about just how serious this incident was.

Another Record Year For Fewest Crashes; Not So With Trespass Incidents

Unofficial preliminary figures note 2008 was a second consecutive record year for fewest collisions at Maine's more than 1,600 public and private railroad crossings. Checking with Maine's railroads, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the Maine Department of Transportation, there were two train-vehicle crashes, fortunately neither resulting in injury. The year earlier, there were four such collisions. The news wasn't as good regarding rail trespassing. There were two trespass incidents last year resulting in three non-fatal injuries compared to no trespass casualties in 2007.



Outdoor Enthusiasts New Target for Rail Safety

In cooperation with courses sanctioned by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW), nearly 1,000 hunters, snowmobilers, and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) riders learned the consequences of trespassing on private railroad property in 2008. Course instructors, understanding the dangers their students can encounter along Maine's more than 1,100 miles of active rail lines, were agreeable to Operation Lifesaver volunteers taking about 20 minutes – enough time for a brief presentation and short video – to get out the safety message. Many of the attendees are young, impressionable individuals who we hope can remember our message for many years. There are more than 100 such hunter, snowmobile, and ATV safety courses held annually statewide and it's Maine Operation Lifesaver's intention to join forces again during the coming year with IFW in the name of safety.





"Norma Griffiths holds the attention of a group of Aroostook County youngsters during a presentation while Fred Hirsch is joined by Kim Jones of Cary Medical Center at the Caribou hospital's health and safety fair."



Reaching to the Far North

Aroostook County is the largest county east of the Mississippi River in terms of land mass with 6,671 square miles, but a population of only 73,000, or about 11 people per square mile. Still, the forest products industry makes Aroostook a major economic engine and that means an active rail line. Sadly, the sheer distance from central and southern Maine has made it difficult for us to reach the public there – until recently. As part of Maine Operation Lifesaver's campaign to reach schools within a quarter-mile of active railroad tracks, several of those schools in Aroostook County were visited in 2008. Small as many of the schools are and miles apart, nearly 300 students learned of the dangers along railroad tracks which traverse their neighborhoods. Also as part of our commitment to reach The County, Maine O/L's presence was noticed during a local hospital's health and safety fair. More Aroostook County locations will be visited in the near future.

Volunteers Spread Safety Message at 35 Venues in 2008

Where Mainers gathered for community events and conferences last year, Maine Operation Lifesaver volunteers drew their attention at displays and exhibits to familiarize them with safety when crossing tracks and preventing them from rail trespassing. Here's where we could be found:

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| NewPage Safety Fair, Rumford | Auburn Mall |
| Sanford Train Show | Orono Public Safety Day |
| Great Falls Model RR Show, Topsham | Lewiston Library |
| Maine Children's Museum, Portland | Airport Mall, Bangor |
| Teen Driver Challenge, Augusta | Bangor Mall |
| Scarborough Schools Fair | W. Bath Fire Depart. Open House |
| Bath Police Safety Day | McLaughlin's Gardens, S. Paris |
| Monmouth Family Safety Day | Bucksport Bay Festival |
| American Folk Festival, Bangor | Brunswick Naval Air Show |
| Hampden Children's Day | |
| Penobscot Community Health Care Fair, Bangor | |
| Maine Safety/Health Conference, Augusta | |
| Brunswick Fire Department Open House | |
| Maine Adult Education Association Conference, Newry | |
| Great Falls Model RR Club Train Show, Lewiston | |
| Carey Medical Center Health Fair, Caribou | |
| Maine Discovery Museum, Bangor | |
| Maine DOT Appreciation Day, Dixfield | |
| Waldo County Healthcare Fair, Belfast | |
| Sappi Paper Employee Appreciation, Hinckley | |
| So. Maine EMS/Maine Medical Center Fair, Portland | |
| American Public Works Assn. Conference, Skowhegan | |
| Maine Association of Pupil Transportation, Carrabasset Valley | |
| Maine Emergency Management Agency Hazmat Conference, Augusta | |
| Maine Driver Education Association Conference | |
| Maine School Health Promotion Conference, Carrabasset Valley | |

New Presenters Help Promote Safety Message

Safety at rail crossings and prevention of rail trespassing is now being promoted with the addition of five new certified presenters in 2008, bringing to 26 the number of presenters statewide. Certified last year were:

- Mike Lee, Amtrak detective
- Jay Calnan, Maine D.O.T. (retired)
- Muriel Oakes, Certified Nursing Assistant
- Gary Briggs, Dead River Company
- Harvey Boatman, ME Dept. of Education (retired)

Following a day-long course learning material to familiarize themselves with Operation Lifesaver and tips to engage audiences, certification is completed after their first presentation monitored and critiqued by a seasoned presenter.

Those Reached Through O/L Presentations...

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Driver Education Students	301	132	250	251	314	213
Driver Education Instructors	23	8	0	0	0	56
Professional Drivers	0	172	84	455	200	66
Law Enforcement	33	57	98	65	24	15
Emergency Responders	168	123	104	135	77	108
School Bus Drivers	50	58	1213	43	141	277
Students (preschool - 12)	5172	1161	3970	5102	1038	2376
ATV, Snowmobile, Hunter Safety	0	0	0	0	0	969
Civic Groups, others	41	364	349	567*	338	212
TOTALS	5788	2075	6068	6618	2132	4292

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

Former State Coordinator, Longtime Volunteer Remembered

George Mossey, who helped lead Maine Operation Lifesaver through its early years, passed away October 21, 2008 at the age of 80. George was employed for many years with the former Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, heading safety for the line before retiring. Emmons Lancaster shared Maine O/L state coordinator duties with George, and reflected: "I enjoyed the times when we worked together...he handling the local business and I the dealing with the Alexandria OLI office. He was a good mentor for me and loyal to our selected tasks for Maine OL." Fred Hirsch, Maine Operation Lifesaver's current state coordinator, remembers George as his first contact with the organization back in 1994 and introducing Fred to its members and mission.



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