

An Open Letter To School Principals

Fred Hirsch, State Coordinator



I just don't understand.

Representing Maine Operation Lifesaver, I have over the years contacted literally dozens of schools in towns and cities where trains regularly operate – sometimes a few times a week and more often several or even many times a day – requesting that we visit for a free rail safety presentation.

First, we send a letter to you, the school principal, and towards the end of our note advise you that we will follow up with a phone call unless you call first. The first follow-up call inevitably results in leaving a voice mail message or the school secretary taking my phone number. A week or two later, another phone message is left. Then an e-mail message with a copy of the original letter attached just in case it didn't make it to your desk or you needed your memory refreshed. With still no response, another e-mail or phone message goes out. More often than not, still no response.

OK, this is not the routine for every principal we contact. On at least two occasions, a principal has called us, prompted by childhood memories of a friend who was hit by a train. However, these were by far the exception.

Do you, as a school principal, the CEO of the school, delegate authority? Might the assistant principal, the school resource officer, or the school nurse take the reins on this request? If a rail safety presentation isn't for you, maybe your secretary could make a phone call.

We are most surprised when no response comes from schools where railroad tracks are within 1,000 feet of the building, and in some cases within easy sight right from the windows.

In nearby New Brunswick, Canada, our Operation Lifesaver colleague Lorrie Johnston says schools call her requesting railroad safety presentations. Is the education culture there so different from just across the border here in Maine?

Yes, we realize we're competing with the fire department and police, the bicycle safety folks, diversity and anti-bullying organizations – all who want to deliver with their worthy messages. Maine Operation Lifesaver is happy to take its turn. One day. A half hour. Once every few years. That's all.

I just hope one of your students isn't involved in a rail trespass incident down the street. You'll never forgive yourself.

Maine Mirrors National Trend – Collisions, Trespass Incidents Up

While there is no clear reason, vehicles colliding with trains and trespass injuries and fatalities in Maine and nationally were up in 2013 compared to a year earlier. Locally, there were five train-vehicle crashes last year occurring along four rail lines. Two of those collisions involved commercial trucks. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries or deaths. Three trespassers in Maine sustained serious injuries including two fatalities in 2013. Two were on the tracks when hit; one was attempting to climb aboard a train and fell underneath. Those three incidents topped the two trespass fatalities in Maine a year earlier. Figures represented here are not official, but rather tallied by Maine Operation Lifesaver. Nationally, trespass incidents and collisions are also up. One theory is that more vehicles are on streets and highways and an increase also in rail traffic.

Crossing Safety For New Drivers Still a Priority

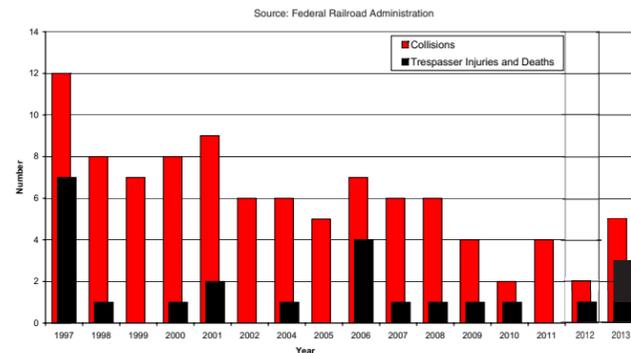
The number of new student drivers directly reached through Maine Operation Lifesaver presentations in 2013 continued to soar. Maine O/L volunteers have determined reaching those taking driver education are a priority, most importantly because they soon will be using their automotive skills for a first time and secondly, because we can take a few moments to impress upon them the dangers of rail trespassing – something else we hope they'll remember as they embrace adulthood.

Last year, 1,574 driver ed students were enlightened by a rail crossing presentation. That's a 43% increase over the 1,101 new drivers reached in 2012, and 136% more students than the 666 in 2011. Nearly all those taking driver ed instruction were teens, also included were a small number of truck driver ed students. To put things in perspective, though, the Bureau of Motor Vehicles issued 13,076 learners' permits last year, so we still have a way to go.

To assist volunteers with their new driver presentations, each has received copies of two videos: "Imagine" produced by Operation Lifesaver, Inc., and Amtrak's "Cheating Death" video which highlights a train-vehicle collision which killed four Florida teens as well as trespass dangers. Also, the "Imagine" DVD was offered free to instructors at last year's Maine Driver Education Association conference and will continue to be distributed at the 2014 Maine Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association meeting.

Three new volunteers sets team total at 36.

Last November, at Maine O/L's annual luncheon, three new presenters, or facilitators as we are becoming known as, joined over 30 active participants spreading the message of safety around and crossing railroad tracks. Mike Truman is a school bus driver and trainer for the Presque Isle area. Paula Adam of Brunswick, who also completed training last year, is with Neighbors, Inc elderly care. Railroad employees, who are often most aware of the need for rail safety, are most welcome, and that's why Andrew Harris of Freeport,, employed by Pan Am Railways, has joined Maine Operation Lifesaver.

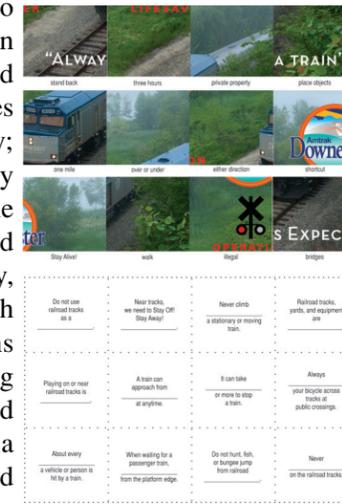


Props help enhance, draw attention to Operation Lifesaver programs



One of the new props acquired by Maine Operation Lifesaver allows children to circle poor behavior around railroad tracks. Two of these whiteboards were purchased.

Throughout the year, like in a movie studio, Maine O/L volunteers suggest ways to better "set the scene" when in the public arena. That means purchasing new props to get the rail safety message across to our audiences. Dick Clark, a G-gauge model enthusiast, discovered taking a couple of his giant pieces of rolling stock to events drew the attention of attendees. Shortly thereafter, Maine O/L purchased four such cars for display. Later last year, everyone chose new shirts – long-sleeved or Polo-type – with the logo and "Maine" proudly worn to sustain our smart looks in public. A second powerpoint projector makes programs more tech-savvy; with a grant supported by our national office and the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, 25,000 sticker puzzles with 12 rail trespass questions and answers are being handed out to youth and adults. The newest item is a giant, framed whiteboard which youngsters can circle around safe and dangerous scenarios.



Maine O/L's popular sticker puzzle



Maine Operation Lifesaver's website features a page featuring pictures of trespassing on railroad property in Maine. This onemight top them all, taken last year by a hidden camera.

Displays and exhibits where we reached thousands of young and old...

Total event contacts made: 2,792

- Lions' train show, Augusta
- 3-Railers train show, Augusta
- Waldo County Hospital health/safety fair, Belfast
- School bus conferences: S. Berwick, Hinckley, Farmington, Gray, Fort Kent
- Maine Driver and Traffic Safety Education Assn. Conference, Portland
- National Train Day, Brunswick, Bangor
- Officer on the Train, Presque Isle
- Bangor Mall
- Schoolsite Health Promotion Conference, Carrabassett Valley
- Hobo Holiday, Auburn
- American Driver and Traffic Safety Association Conference, Portland
- Governor's Restaurant, Lewiston
- Great Falls Model RR Club Balloonfest, Auburn
- American Folk Festival, Bangor
- Lowe's Safety Day, Thomaston
- Bangor Fire Dept. Open House
- Maine Health/Safety Conference, Bangor
- Maine Driver Education Assn., Waldo
- Auburn Train Show
- Brewer High School Health/Safety Fair
- American Public Works Assn, Skowhegan
- Eastern Maine Model RR Club Train Show, Brewer



Brian Beeler meets with Brunswick kindergarteners. It's never too early to teach them.

For more information, to obtain educational material, or to arrange for a free safety presentation, go to www.maineol.org, or email at: maineol@roadrunner.com

Call: (207) 945-6878, or write to: Maine Operation Lifesaver 69 Thirteenth St., Bangor, Maine 04401

Statistics 2013

Beginning in 2013, selected statistics will be compiled electronically rather than straining to count every one of the nearly 200 presentations last year.

	# of presentations	attendance
Grade Crossing Crash Investigation	1	27
Rail Safety for Emergency Responders	8	367
All Driver Education	118	1574
Firefighters/911 Operators	4	64
K-12 Students	25	947
Law Enforcement	1	35
General Adult/Hunter Safety	12	424
Pre-K	1	15
Professional Drivers – Truck, Bus	4	20
School Bus Drivers	15	519
Presentation total	180	3597