



# Sunflower State Signal

Official Publication of Kansas Operation Lifesaver, Inc.

## Coordinator's Corner



This year I have tried to bring some interesting railroad news to the Sunflower. In the wake of several derailments, strikes, FRA changes, and incidents it seems the country is very opinionated about railroads and railroad safety right now.

So, I thought I would use this political climate to remind everyone that Operation Lifesaver does not get involved with railroad politics or make statements about the suspected causes of incidents. We operate above that to save lives.

Many of you work in the railroad industry and have strong beliefs. That is a great thing. Your passion for the industry motivates you. KS OL just asks that when you share those beliefs you do it as an individual or as a rep for your company. When wearing your "KS OL hat" make sure you stick to the "we will let the investigators, law enforcement, & railroads determine what happened." Then tell them to "See Tracks? Think Train!"

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## As a New Semester Begins, Operation Lifesaver, Inc. Releases PSA Urging College Students to Make Safe Choices Near Railroad Tracks

WASHINGTON, DC, January 19, 2022 – A new [rail safety public service announcement \(PSA\)](#) for students attending colleges and universities that include or are near railroad tracks was released today by Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI), the national non-profit rail safety education organization. The PSA highlights the importance of making safe choices when walking or driving around railroad tracks and trains.

**Every three hours in the United States, a person or vehicle is hit by a train.** Preliminary Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) statistics show 690 people were injured and 196 killed in 1,901 U.S. vehicle-train collisions in 2020. An additional 557 people were killed and 523 injured in 2020 rail trespassing incidents. On foot or in a vehicle, results can be the same — severe injury or even death.

"Whether rushing to class, campus events or just to meet your friends, it's important for college students to [recognize the risks and make safe choices](#) around railroad tracks and trains. The shortest route between locations may not be the best choice," said OLI Executive Director Rachel Maleh. "Whether driving over or walking

across tracks, college students need to recognize the signs and make safe choices. The wrong decision could be devastating. Together, we can stop track tragedies."

OLI urges the public to:

- Use increased attention when approaching and crossing railroad tracks
- Know the facts
- Recognize and obey signs and signals
- Cross only at designated crossings whether driving or walking
- Know what to do in the event a vehicle is stalled or stuck on the tracks

"Operation Lifesaver offers free rail safety presentations in communities across the country," Maleh noted. "We look forward to sharing the rail safety message. Visit [oli.org](http://oli.org) today to request a presentation," she concluded.

The PSAs are available to the public with English and Spanish voiceovers and captions in 60, 30 and 15-second lengths through the [Materials section](#) of the [oli.org](http://oli.org) website and are downloadable at <https://vimeo.com/operationlifesaver>.



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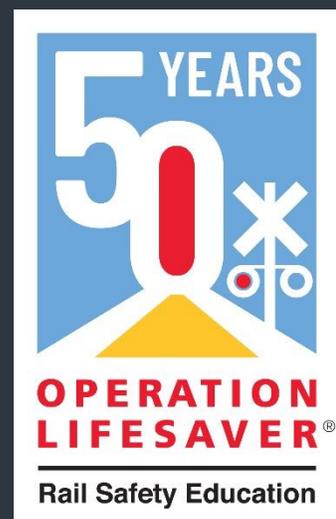
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# 'Like a scary movie ... but it's real.' What to know about safety around railroad tracks.

KENTUCKY, July 18, 2022-For a train engineer, seeing a car or a person ahead on the tracks is a living nightmare. "It's like a scary movie on TV, but it's real," said retired engineer Wayne Gentry. "You see it occurring in front of you. You know you're going to hit them."

Gentry said a train going 55 mph takes a mile or more to stop, and the only thing to do is hit "all the brakes that you have" and then "watch it unfold." "As an engineer, I was devastated," he said.

During his career traveling daily between Louisville and Danville for Norfolk Southern, Gentry went through that over and over again. "I was involved in 43 crashes and one suicide," he said. "I had trouble sleeping."

Now that he's retired, Gentry, of Louisville, has dedicated himself to providing education to as many Kentuckians as he can about railroad safety. He is Kentucky's state coordinator for the nonprofit Operation Lifesaver, a nationwide organization supported by the railroad industry.

"The only thing that can keep people safe is awareness," he said. "I do the best I can to give people information and hope they make better choices." A handful of collisions involving trains have occurred in Kentucky recently, including one in Laurel County that left a teenager dead, one in Lexington that left someone seriously hurt, and another in Barren County that killed a truck driver. Gentry said there are important steps everyone can take to make sure they stay safe around trains.

## HOW COMMON ARE TRAIN INCIDENTS?

There were 763 fatalities involving trains in the U.S. last year, 10 of which were in Kentucky, according to the Federal Railroad Administration. There were 4,597 injuries reported, including 31 in Kentucky.

Gentry said that over the past 50 years, the number of crashes involving trains has decreased, primarily because of education, enforcement of laws about crossing tracks and engineering improvements such as better signaling and signage at crossings. But there are still hundreds of people injured and killed in incidents involving trains each year.

Data indicates that deaths involving pedestrians are more common than those involving motorists. The Federal Railroad Administration says suicides are among the more common causes of railroad-related fatalities, and since 2011, it has tracked and sought strategies for preventing them. The national suicide prevention hotline is open 24/7 and can be reached by calling 988.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Operation Lifesaver and the Federal Railroad Administration have educational materials and resources available through their websites. If you have a device with Amazon's Alexa on it, Gentry said you can also say, "[Alexa, open train safety trivia](#)," and your Alexa device will begin a trivia game. He said his stepdaughter wrote the program for him because she knows how important the issue is to him.

Gentry said his organization has volunteers throughout the state who make presentations to school bus drivers, new drivers, school children and other groups on track safety.

His final word on train safety is one that could apply to many life situations: "Always be aware of your surroundings. Don't be so preoccupied with whatever else you're doing."

[Read more](#)



## Kansas Incidents

**2022**

Trespassing Incidents

4

Crossings Incidents\*

8

(5 injury, 2 fatality)

\*Current through 3/22

**2021**

Trespassing Incidents

14

Deaths

11

Injuries

3

Crossings Incidents

35

Deaths

5

Injuries

10

Total Incidents

49

Deaths

16

Injuries

12

# 988 the New 911 for Mental Health



On July 16, 2022, in Kansas and nationally, a new 988 number became available 24 hours a day/7 days a week for people dealing with a mental health crisis. 988 will be the three-digit number for call (multiple languages), text or chat (English only)

that connects people to the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, where accessible care and support are available for anyone experiencing mental health-related distress. The chat feature will be available through the Lifeline's website.

People can call 988 if they are having thoughts of suicide, mental health or substance use crises, any other kind of emotional distress, or are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support.

If you need suicide or mental health-related crisis support, or are worried about someone else, please call or text 1-800-273-8255 or visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's [chat](#) to connect with a trained crisis counselor. The Lifeline provides 24/7 free and confidential support. The longer Lifeline phone number (1-800-273-8255) will always remain available.

## Don't Forget to Log Your Hours!!!

OLI is looking at volunteer lists and removing and/or inactivating OLAVs that have not logged their hours or shown activity in years. Please when you do a presentation take the time to go to the [OLI website](#), login, and record your presentations and events!

We also use these numbers for grant funds. Please it only takes a few minutes

## UP COMING EVENTS

**October 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10:00 - 3:00:** [Model Train Show & Swap Meet](#)  
Great Overland Station, Topeka (OLAVs Needed)

**November 10th, 11:00:** KS OL Board & Committee Meeting (lunch provided),  
Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, Anton Room 202  
[1515 SW 10th Ave, Topeka, KS 66604](#)



# KS OL OUT & ABOUT: Back to School Edition!

## FRA Kansas Statistics Last 5 years:

### 2017:

Incidents: 52  
Crossings: 34  
    Fatalities: 5  
Trespass: 18  
    Fatalities: 10

### 2018:

Incidents: 46  
Crossings: 35  
    Fatalities: 5  
Trespass: 11  
    Fatalities: 9

### 2019:

Incidents: 44  
Crossings: 32  
    Fatalities: 5  
Trespass: 12  
    Fatalities: 3

### 2020:

Incidents: 49  
Crossings: 36  
    Fatalities: 9  
Trespass: 13  
    Fatalities: 6

### 2021:

Incidents: 49  
Crossings: 35  
    Fatalities: 5  
Trespass: 14  
    Fatalities: 11



Olathe East High School Drivers Education Classes



Adrian Hertog presents to an auditorium of Seaman HS students



Schuetz Driving School, in Olathe

Leavenworth High School Drivers Education Class



Buckle Up Driving School, LLC, New Driver Education and Training Program in Lawrence



Free Train Day at Gage Park, Topeka



White Line CDL Training Incorporated School for Professional Truck Drivers in Topeka

**EVERY 3 HOURS**  
A PERSON OR VEHICLE IS HIT BY A TRAIN.  
DON'T BE A STATISTIC  
www.ol.org

