KTruckRailSafety

Take precaution with farm machinery, grain loads at rail crossings

BY KAY SHIPMAN  
FarmWeek

Farmers and their employees, especially seasonal workers, need to take precautions at rail crossings during harvest.

Kirby Wagner, Illinois Farm Bureau assistant director of transportation and infrastructure, reminded vehicle drivers it is important to be cautious of trains and rail crossings as harvest begins. Operation Lifesaver Inc. will mark Rail Safety Week Sept. 22-28.

During Rail Safety Week, a different safety aspect will be highlighted daily, but overall attention will be devoted to distracted driving, commuter safety and pedestrian safety. Operation Life Saver produces graphics and educational materials available to promote rail safety.

Rail Safety Week comes at a good time as activity in rural areas increases because of harvest, Wagner said.

“Rail crossings come in all different shapes and sizes,” Wagner said. “Elevation, distance in front and just past the crossing make each crossing unique and can increase the need for caution.”

A railroad crossing pitch may produce problems for farm drivers, especially with loads of grain, Wagner said. Large equipment or a loaded trailer can bottom out on the rails. “Sometimes, weight will affect clearance,” he said.

Given the amount of road construction this year, construction projects on railroad crossings and other roads could have occurred since the last time a farmer drove a semi on them. “Those approaches may not be the same as they were in the spring or last harvest,” Wagner added.

And be alert for vehicles, such as school buses, that legally must stop at all rail crossings.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) warns drivers when approaching a crossing to pay attention to flashing lights, whistles, closing gates or stop signs.

If the vehicle gets stuck on the tracks, move away in the direction of the train if one is coming. Immediately call 911 or the posted 800 number to report a stalled vehicle and ensure the railroad is contacted.

Provide the crossing’s exact location using the U.S. DOT/AAR crossing inventory number, normally referred to as an FRA number. The number consists of six digits followed by a letter and is posted on a metal plate at each crossing. The number may be posted on the crossbuck post or signal pole, box or bungalow. In addition to reporting the number, include the name of the road or highway that crosses the tracks.

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