Short Line Safety Institute

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TRAIN HORN/WHISTLE

During the calendar year 2020, the FRA tabulated the following numbers for highway-rail crossing incidents:

- 1,723 grade crossing incidents
- 188 total fatalities
- 620 non-fatal conditions

There are 127,365 public highway-rail crossings in the United States

- Of the total public crossings, 53,184 are equipped with gates
- An additional 16,736 crossings are equipped with other activated warning devices
- 57,445 crossings are equipped with passive warning devices, such as crossbucks
- In addition to public highway-rail crossings, there are 77,216 private crossings

In 2020 the combination of grade crossing and trespasser incidents resulted in 95.93 percent of all railroad related fatalities.

49 CFR §222 and GCOR 5.8.2 spell out in detail when and where horn/whistle signals are to be utilized and in what pattern. It is the responsibility of locomotive engineers to always follow their railroad's adopted rules for horn/whistle use and sequence during the operation of trains or engines.

If a vehicle operator on a roadway is distracted, and the railroad engineer fails to properly utilize the train horn/whistle to alert them, the combination of those two elements may end in tragedy.

Every engineer must also understand that their responsibilities for horn/whistle use does not end with their railroad's rules unless those rules also include the following provision from 49 CFR §222.23:

(a)(1): notwithstanding any other provision of this part, a locomotive engineer may sound the locomotive horn to provide a warning to animals, vehicle operators, pedestrians, trespassers or crews on other trains in an emergency situation if, in the locomotive engineer's sole judgment, such action is appropriate in order to prevent imminent injury, death, or property damage.

As engineers your actions and reactions can save lives!