



News Release
Ashland Police Department
www.ashlandpolice.us
Douglas A. Goodman, Chief
Date: Wednesday, January 25, 2017

For Immediate Release

Town of Ashland Announces Initiatives to Improve Safety at Rail Crossings

The past week has seen some extraordinary activity at grade crossings within the Town of Ashland. Within the town limits, CSX Transportation maintains 2.34 miles of parallel rails for cargo and passenger travel. Within that two-mile stretch, there are seven at grade crossings traversed by an estimated 32,000 motor vehicle trips per day (*source: 2015 VDOT traffic counts). On average, Ashland sees 60-80 trains per day when combining cargo and passenger trips.

Due to the recent alarming incidents at the Ashcake Road crossing and England Street crossing in the past week, the Ashland Police Department completed a detailed analysis of the reported incidents involving motor vehicles and the railroad tracks since 2007. This is a summary of the results:

- APD responded to 18 incidents on the railroad tracks involving a motor vehicle.
- Four incidents involved actual collisions with trains. Fortunately, none involved fatal injuries.
- 78% of the 18 total incidents were at times of darkness.
- 67% involved the consumption of alcohol as a contributing factor.
- 50% of the incidents occurred at the England Street grade crossing with the balance occurring at the remaining six grade crossing or along the tracks.
- In addition to these 18 incidents, APD is aware of another 12 incidents that were reported by citizens but the vehicle was gone upon officers' arrival or was captured by private camera systems and later reported without any further incident.
- Several incidents involved GPS directions that may have contributed to drivers making a turn "too early" onto the tracks versus Center Street that runs parallel adjacent to the tracks.
- 2016 saw the highest number of incidents with five total incidents (three at times of darkness, two involving alcohol).
 - *Anecdotal evidence would indicate that the distraction of smart phones, whether texting and driving or reliance on GPS directions may be to blame for the recent uptick in the past few years.*

As safety at our crossings and around the rails is of paramount concern to the Town our recent initiatives to enhance security include:



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- The addition of enhanced roadway striping at the England Street grade crossing in 2011 to better delineate the travel lanes for motor vehicle traffic.
- The installation of LED street lamps along Railroad Avenue during the 2013 “Streetscape” projects greatly improved lighting in the area.
- To ensure the readiness of our first responders, APD coordinated with Hanover Fire-EMS in 2015 to host a multi-day training exercise centered around emergencies on the rails.
- Since the fall of 2016, the Town has been in discussions with CSX, federal rail officials and state representatives regarding improved signage leading up to grade crossings and other enhancements.

Based on those discussions, the Town is pursuing the following initiatives to further improve safety along the rail corridor:

- Installation of small, high-visibility reflective pavement markers along the edge of the roadway to better delineate the travel lanes.
- Working with various navigation apps and aids to include a warning when using GPS directions that advises drivers of the proximity of the railroad tracks.
- Exploring the possibility of additional lighting to illuminate the grade crossing, especially at the England Street crossing.

Rail safety is everyone’s concern and we offer the following safety tips courtesy of Operation Lifesaver (www.oli.org):

- ***Trains and cars don't mix.*** Never race a train to the crossing — even if you tie, you lose.
- ***The train you see is closer and faster-moving than you think.*** If you see a train approaching, wait for it to go by before you proceed across the tracks.
- ***Be aware that trains cannot stop quickly.*** Even if the locomotive engineer sees you, a freight train moving at 55 miles per hour can take a mile or more to stop once the emergency brakes are applied. That's 18 football fields!
- ***Never drive around lowered gates — it's illegal and deadly.*** If you suspect a signal is malfunctioning, call the emergency number posted on or near the crossing signal or your local law enforcement agency.
- ***Do not get trapped on the tracks;*** proceed through a highway-rail grade crossing only if you are sure you can completely clear the crossing without stopping. Remember, the train is three feet wider than the tracks on both sides.

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- **If your vehicle ever stalls on the tracks, get out and get away from the tracks, even if you do not see a train.** Locate the Emergency Notification System sign and call the number provided, telling them about the stalled vehicle. If a train is approaching, run toward the train but away from the tracks at a 45-degree angle. If you run in the same direction a train is traveling, you could be injured by flying debris.
- **At a multiple track crossing waiting for a train to pass,** watch out for a second train on the other tracks, approaching from either direction.
- **When you need to cross train tracks,** go to a designated crossing, look both ways, and cross the tracks quickly, without stopping. Remember it isn't safe to stop closer than 15 feet from a rail.
- **ALWAYS EXPECT A TRAIN!** Freight trains do not follow set schedules.

Table: Reported Incidents Involving Motor Vehicles & Railroad Tracks in Ashland 2007 to Present

Year	Incidents	Time of Day			Alcohol Related	Collision with Train	Location of Incident		
		Light	Dusk	Dark			At 54 Grade Crossing	All Other Grade Crossings	Other Incidents not at Grade Crossing
2007	0								1
2008	2			2	2	1	1		
2009	1			1	1				1
2010	1			1	1				1
2011	1			1	1		1		
2012	2	1		1	0	1	1	1	
2013	1			1	1			1	
2014	1			1	1		1		
2015	2		1	1	2			2	
2016	5	1	1	3	2		4	1	
2017	2			2	1	2	1	1	
Total	18	2	2	14	12	4	9	6	3

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