



Farm safety includes being rail-safe

Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

With nearly 45,000 kilometres of active railway tracks and roughly 40,000 railway crossings from coast to coast, many Canadians encounter trains daily.

That's especially true in rural areas, where many farms are located near railway tracks.

“In 2022 there were 232 incidents between trains and vehicles or people in Canada that resulted in 66 fatalities and 43 serious injuries,” explains CN Police Constable Michael Reid. “Many of these incidents occurred in close proximity to the victim’s residence and each one may have been preventable.”

Did you know that given their large size, trains often appear to be farther away and travelling much slower than they actually are? But don't be fooled. It takes the equivalent length of 18 football fields for the average freight train, which travels at speeds up to 100 km/h and can weigh tens of thousands of tonnes, to come to a stop.

So, while farm machinery is larger than most other vehicles, they are still no match for trains.

And with most farm crossings being passive (not having warning lights, bells, or gates), it's essential to take extra care to ensure safety.

Safe crossings

When approaching a crossing, always open cab windows, turn off radios and fans, remove headsets and listen for oncoming trains. Look in both directions and look around obstructions like mirrors and windshield pillars. Keep in mind that winter conditions can be particularly hazardous and require extra care, as snow can muffle the sound of approaching trains and ice can cause your machinery to slide into crossings.

Once you've determined it's safe to cross, ensure your machinery is properly lined up with the railway crossing; having the wheels cross tracks at a 90-degree angle will prevent heavily loaded equipment from tipping over. You also want to check that there is enough room on the other side of the tracks to fully clear the crossing without stopping and that the back of your equipment won't be within five metres of the tracks if you have to stop on the other side.

Be aware of your equipment

It's important to note that not all farm machinery can easily cross railway tracks. An example is low-slung equipment, which should never be used to cross since it can get caught in the tracks.



When using new farm machinery for the first time, especially if it's particularly wide or heavy, ensure it can cross tracks quickly and safely. Don't hesitate to contact the railway for assistance regarding any non-standard machinery.

If you're towing equipment, it's crucial to prevent it from becoming unhitched when going over farm crossings, so always secure hitch pins with a pin key. And remember to watch wagons and other equipment while crossing to ensure nothing dislodges or becomes caught in the tracks.

Getting stuck or stalled on the tracks

No one wants to get stuck or stalled on train tracks, but if it happens, get out of the machinery immediately and move at least 30 metres away to avoid being struck by debris if your vehicle is hit by a train.

Once you are safely away from the machinery, contact the railway company to let them know a vehicle is on the tracks. Railway companies post their emergency numbers on a blue sign under the crossbuck (the traffic sign used to indicate a railway crossing) or near the crossing. The number may also be posted on a nearby signal house. This is the first number to call if your machinery becomes stuck or stalls on the tracks, as it's the only way to stop approaching trains. If you are unable to locate the emergency number, call 911.

No matter the type of machinery you are driving or where you are heading, we all share the same goal of getting home safely at the end of the day. Taking safety precautions around railway crossings will help ensure that goal is reached.

"Farmers and the agriculture industry are crucial to the Canadian economy and by working together we can feed the world. But we all need to make sure we do that safely," says Reid. "As trains can take up to two kilometres to stop, always obey the signs and signals at railway crossings. Use precaution and stay alert around crossings to ensure you stay safe during your workday."

For more safety information, please visit www.agsafetyweek.ca.

Every year, CASA raises awareness about the importance of safety on Canadian farms through Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW), which takes place during the third week of March. In 2024, CASW takes place March 10-16, and is sponsored by CN, Syngenta Canada, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Fertilizer Canada, and Parrish & Heimbecker.