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Rail Safety Education Still a Necessity Throughout Illinois Operation Lifesaver Celebrates 50 Years of Rail Safety Education

Chicago, IL – April 26, 2022 – In Illinois last year, approximately 103 people were killed or injured in grade crossing and trespassing incidents. Illinois Operation Lifesaver works to prevent these needless incidents from happening through public awareness campaigns, education programs and free rail safety presentations.

[Operation Lifesaver](#), the non-profit rail safety education and awareness organization dedicated to reducing collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail crossings and preventing trespassing on or near railroad tracks, is observing its 50th anniversary in 2022. Over the past five decades, Operation Lifesaver and its safety partners have helped reduce railroad crossing incidents by 84 percent across the nation. **But there is more work to do – every three hours a person or vehicle is hit by a train in the United States.**

“The Illinois Commerce Commission has overseen Illinois’ rail safety efforts for more than 150 years. Keeping pedestrians, motorists, and train employees safe near and around railroad tracks and trains is a top priority for our agency. We are proud of our partnership with Operation Lifesaver, year after year the statistics reflect the effectiveness of our robust educational efforts and awareness campaigns,” said ICC Chairman Carrie Zalewski.

“With over 7500 public at-grade crossings in Illinois there were 124 crashes in 2021, far less than 50 years ago when the number of crashes per year averaged around 850. We won’t rest until the number of crossing and trespass incidents in Illinois reaches zero,” said ICC Commissioner Michael Carrigan.

State Representative Robyn Gabel (D-18th) has championed rail safety efforts in the Illinois General Assembly. In 2021 she sponsored and helped pass into law legislation (PA – 102-0016) to expand the ICC’s authority and use of Grade Crossing Protection Funds for the purpose of deterring trespassing on railroad property. She also sponsored House Resolution 750 recognizing Operation Lifesaver 50th anniversary.

“Illinois has long been a leader in supporting highway-rail safety programs. Vigorous and wide-reaching public information and education programs have proven to be highly effective in reducing the number of collisions involving trains. And while the number of deaths and injuries have dropped over the past five decades, the mission of Operation Lifesaver remains as important as ever,” said Gabel.





Operation Lifesaver was founded in 1972. Illinois was the fourth state to adopt the Operation Lifesaver rail safety awareness and education program in 1976.

“Operation Lifesaver empowers our state’s citizens to make safe choices around railroad tracks and trains,” said Rail Safety Program Administrator Brian Vercruysse. “We urge Illinois residents to know the facts, make good decisions, request free safety presentations, and share the rail safety message. Together, we can #STOPTrackTragedies.”

“Volunteers are the heart of our organization, sharing rail safety messages virtually and in person across Illinois. Since 1997, Operation Lifesaver volunteers in Illinois have provided over 50,000 presentations to an audience of over 3 million people. Reaching new drivers and providing them with information has been key to reducing the number of collisions over the years,” said ICC Rail Safety Specialist and Illinois Operation Lifesaver Statewide Coordinator Chip Pew. “We have a need right now for new volunteers to train and help us spread the word.” If you are interested in becoming an Illinois Operation Lifesaver volunteer email: ICC.RailSafety@illinois.gov.

Operation Lifesaver offers free virtual or in-person rail safety presentations – tailored to each audience to include photographers, truck drivers, K-12 students, new drivers, first responders, community groups and more. Sign up for a presentation at oli.org.

“We thank the Illinois Commerce Commission for sponsoring Operation Lifesaver in your state, leading the way in safety regulation on high-performance routes such as the Chicago-St. Louis corridor and for taking special steps to educate the public with your signage program along the railroads,” said Amtrak EVP and Chief Safety Officer Steve Predmore. “We’re proud to work with you by having our specially painted locomotive in Chicago today. “We wish Chip Pew a happy retirement, leaving your agency after a job well-done as Operation Lifesaver State Coordinator.”

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About Operation Lifesaver, Inc.

Operation Lifesaver, which this year celebrates the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1972, is a non-profit public safety education and awareness organization dedicated to reducing collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail crossings and preventing trespassing on or near railroad tracks. In 1986 the non-profit [Operation Lifesaver, Inc.](#) national office was created to help support and coordinate the efforts of state Operation Lifesaver programs, saving lives by sharing rail safety messages with audiences across the U.S. and beyond. A national network of trained volunteers gives free presentations on rail safety and a public awareness campaign, “[See Tracks? Think Train!](#)” provides tips and statistics to encourage safe behavior near the tracks. Learn more about [Rail Safety Week](#); follow OLI on social media via [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#) and [YouTube](#).

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