

Safe Practices near Railroad Tracks

By Douglas D. Brannon, Esq. [Brannon & Associates](#)

"Train wreck" – It is a description used metaphorically to refer to disasters of all kinds. The phrase conjures graphic images of something catastrophic, something so devastating no individual would not want to be part of it. Yet, sadly, every year dozens of trains are involved in collisions with cars, trucks, and even pedestrians. Ohio alone had 82 such crashes in 2008, 11 of which resulted in fatalities.

Ohio is a national leader in rail traffic, operating nearly 5,500 miles of track which intersects public roadways in more than 6,500 places. Ohio also ranks as a national leader in railroad crossing crashes; while the number of these crashes has been on a steady decline in recent years, the percentage of collisions that result in an injury or fatality is on the rise.

Personal injury attorneys who specialize in crashes involving trains understand the importance of quickly determining what happened in a rail accident and who is responsible. They work swiftly to preserve accident wreckage, interview witnesses, evaluate liability and protect victim's rights during interviews with authorities and insurance representatives.

In 2008 alone, 32% of crashes occurred at railroad crossings where warning devices were either malfunctioning or missing. It is the responsibility of rail operators and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio to keep railroad crossings safe for public use. If these entities have been negligent in their duties, and the result is in an injury or fatality, the victim has every right to receive compensation – but they may have to fight for it.

In Washington County, Minnesota, for example, a judge upheld a multi-million dollar jury verdict against a rail operator who had failed to maintain safe railroad crossings and, as revealed by court documents, had attempted to avoid liability by destroying evidence regarding crossing signal procedures, signal performance, signal problems, and work on the track at the crossing in question. Situations like this are the reason you or a loved should hire a [personal injury lawyer](#) if ever you are involved in a railroad crossing accident.

To help keep you and your family safe every time you encounter a railroad crossing please abide by the following safety guidelines:

- Remember trains run at all hours of the day or night, so always expect a train at a railroad crossing.
- When approaching a railroad crossing always stop and look both ways before crossing, even if warning bells are not sounding.
- Always be prepared to yield to a train.
- Never drive around lowered gates.
- If a train is approaching, never try to beat it across the tracks.
- Never stop on the railroad tracks; if traffic is backed up wait to enter the intersection until you have clearance on the far side
- Watch for a second train when crossing multiple tracks.
- If your vehicle stalls on a crossing, get out immediately and call the police for assistance

- Never walk, run, cycle or ride ATVs on railroad tracks
- Cross tracks only at designated crossings. Stay off bridges and out of tunnels.

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