Freight Rail Safety

KEY TAKEAWAY

Safeguarding the well-being of their employees and the communities along their train routes is a top priority for freight rail companies. Thanks in part to ongoing private investments into technology, infrastructure and equipment, freight rail is the safest way to move goods over land and is working to get safer every day.

Railroads work daily with their employees, suppliers and customers, and federal, state and local officials to safeguard the rail network and the people who operate it and interact with it. Railroads' holistic approach to rail safety focuses on:

- Maintaining and modernizing infrastructure and equipment.
- Rigorously training employees and improving operations.
- Developing and deploying technology.
- Safeguarding communities and supporting first responders.
- Monitoring and protecting physical and digital networks.

Freight rail’s billions of dollars in annual private investments underscore this holistic approach. In fact, there is a direct correlation between rail’s private investments and increased safety. Since The Staggers Act of 1980, which allowed railroads to start pouring billions into their networks each year, the safety record has drastically improved. The train accident rate is down 28% since 2000, and the last decade was the safest ever, with the 2022 hazmat accident rate among the lowest ever.

- **Empowering Employees:** The rail industry has lower employee injury rates than most other sectors, and the injury rate per Class I employee has dropped 59% since 2000. Railroads provide the knowledge and tools railroaders need to do their jobs safely and embrace rail’s safety culture. State-of-the-art training centers with simulators and virtual reality enable employees to practice real-life skills in a controlled environment. Daily employee meetings emphasize teamwork and continual learning on the job. New technologies, like drone-based bridge inspections, help keep employees out of harm’s way while giving them the tools to excel at their jobs.

- **Leveraging Technology:** Technology extends human inspection capabilities and is imperative to freight rail’s forward progress. That’s why railroads use technology every moment of the day to keep employees, communities, infrastructure and equipment safe. From acoustic technologies that can hear the health of a track to machine visioning that can see defects on passing rail cars, these advancements help guide maintenance planning, which has led to greater safety, accuracy and productivity than ever before.
In addition to conducting the various inspections required by FRA, railroads have, for decades, voluntarily invested in testing, implementing and advocating for advanced inspection technology to supplement manual inspections. Moving forward, more automated technologies allow further progress in challenging areas like reducing human error and improving grade crossing safety.

- **Safely Moving Hazmat**: Railroads have lowered the hazmat accident rate by 73% since 2000. Railroads play a crucial role in safely transporting hazmat, ensuring the well-being of communities, their employees and the environment. Beyond complying with strict regulations and operating practices, railroads have advocated for more stringent tank car standards, voluntarily developed the AskRail app for first responders and worked with the FRA to create software to determine the safest and most secure rail routes for hazmat. When an incident does occur, railroads work with first responders to help families and individuals within an affected community.

- **Maintaining Strong Infrastructure**: Since 2000, America’s Class I railroads have spent $439 billion on network maintenance and capital expenditures, while the train accident rate has decreased 28% since 2000. America’s freight rail infrastructure is safe and is recognized as the best infrastructure in America by the ASCE. Adhering to the mantra “a well-run railroad is a safe railroad,” the industry’s commitment to robust investment and technological modernization make tracks, bridges, tunnels, rail cars and locomotives safer and operations more efficient.

- **Safeguarding Pedestrians & Drivers**: The grade crossing collision rate was down 23% last year compared to 2000. From launching the See Tracks, Think Train! campaign to participating in the annual Rail Safety Week, railroads support Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI), a non-profit public safety education and awareness organization. Railroads also work closely with government and community organizations and spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year to maintain and improve grade crossings and to implement new technologies.

- **Building Climate Resiliency**: With safety always a top priority, freight railroads are strengthening their infrastructure and operations to build a more resilient network that can withstand climate-related hazards while continuing to deliver for America in a future shaped by climate change.

- **Protecting the Physical & Digital Networks**: Freight railroads work with government agencies and public partners to monitor every aspect of their physical and digital networks 24/7. Following a regularly updated comprehensive Security Management Plan, railroads share information and identify, mitigate and respond to risks. Since 1999, freight railroads have maintained a unified cybersecurity plan. The rail industry was one of the first to immediately review, test and update safety procedures based on new threats after 9/11.