

Train Accidents and Safety

Serious train accidents are caused by a variety of mechanical and/or human factors. A spokesman for the Federal Railroad Administration in Washington, and others, have suggested that many mechanical failures are actually a result of deferred maintenance. The railroad companies, he said, in an effort to eke out greater profits have reduced or postponed maintenance to both their rolling stock and tracks. In fact, the number of rail maintenance workers is now half what it was 20 years ago.

Human factors causing train accidents involve three areas:

- Health problems of a crew member, like a heart attack
- Substance abuse
- Human error caused by fatigue

While catastrophic health problems are largely unavoidable, and post-accident drug testing has dramatically reduced the incidence of substance abuse, fatigue remains a key factor in a large number of train accidents.

Many train workers agree that sleep deprivation and the grueling schedules were the most serious safety issue on the nation's freight trains. Because of past concerns about fatigue-related crashes, Federal Railroad Administration law now limits train-operator work shifts to 12 hours. But workers contend that being marooned repeatedly in a company motel far from home is not their idea of restful time off.

"The rules are written in blood here," one engineer said. "The only time they change is when people are injured or die."

On the passenger side of the track, there are a number of items and tips that passengers should be aware of to help train workers stay focused, which could then lower accident numbers. Most of the safety tips that passengers need to follow come from realizing that a train is heavy and dangerous machine. A train should always be given the right of way.

Once a train has started moving, it can take a long time for it to stop. A 100-car train moving at 55mph will need at least a mile of track in order to come to a complete stop, once emergency breaks have been applied. If locomotive engineer on a train can see you, it is already too late. With this in mind, always follow traffic signals in regards to train tracks. Trains are not always on an exact schedule, so expect a train at any time. Never race a train to a crossing and do not stop a car on railroad tracks.

As a passenger, simply following the rules posted in train stations will prevent accidents. Never try to board a moving train. When a train approaches, be sure to stay behind the warning strips/signs. The strips may seem unnecessary, but a train may extend three or more feet outside of the rail, causing serious injury to people who are not paying attention.

By following rules and regulations posted in stations, passengers allow train workers to stay focused on their jobs, which can prevent accidents and keeps trains running more smoothly. Although human error and fatigue may still cause accidents, any effort to help reduce the number of those accidents is well worth it. The safety rules were created for a reason, and should be followed in any situation.

The information you obtain from this article is not, nor is it intended to be, legal advice. You should consult an attorney for individual advice regarding your own situation.

About the Author

A [Minneapolis Minnesota lawyer or attorney](#) at a local law firm can provide you with an experienced [Minnesota attorney or lawyer](#).

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