



Rail Safety with Police Departments *Communication is the key to safety*

April 11, 2016 - Seneca Falls, NY – Two dozen local police officers attended a rail safety workshop emphasizing the law enforcement guidelines for rail incidents. The event was held in two 6-hr sessions at Vincent Park (Rt. 318) in Seneca Falls last Tuesday. Attendees included local Officers, Captains, Sheriffs, and Troopers from Seneca Falls, Waterloo, Seneca County, Livingston County, Yates County, Wayne County, Village of Newark, City of Auburn, City of Cortland, and NYS Troopers.

The course was sponsored by Finger Lakes Railway and featured Operation Lifesaver presenters Devan Lawton, Lou Frangella, and Evan Eisenhandler, the NYS Director. Through a combination of actual rail incident video, individual workbooks and live discussion, the officers were able to ask questions and get feedback on how to handle rail-related incidents. Railroads within the region are CSX, Norfolk Southern, Finger Lakes Railway, Ontario Midland of Wayne County and New York Susquehanna and Western of Syracuse/Cooperstown.



Officers learned that while grade crossing vehicle incidents do cause many deaths along a rail line, trespassing is the number one cause of rail deaths in the nation. Trespassing includes entering rail property by foot, vehicle, ATV, mountain bike, golf cart, or snowmobile. “Everyone should remember that at least 50-feet of land on either side of the tracks is usually part of the rail property,” reminds Eisenhandler.

There are existing public and private crossings along the rail line for pedestrians and traffic to safely cross the tracks. Finger Lakes Railway, which operates through Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Ontario, Schuyler and Yates counties, continues to add signs on their property near existing grade crossings warning against trespassing. Now that the local police are better aware of the safety risks, they will be mindful of violations. If any unlawful activities occur on rail property, they have the authority to enforce the law.

Finger Lakes Railway Safety Officer, Karl Henry, and Administrative Rail Clerk and OLI volunteer, Kayla Gottobed, attended the event to answer questions and initiate open communication. “We want to work with all our local police departments,” said Henry. “The

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more they know, the more prepared they will be if an event ever occurs.” Grade crossing incidents with vehicles or trespassers are the two main reasons that law enforcement gets involved on issues with rail property.

For example, a new footpath crossing will be installed later this year in Waterloo along the Cayuga-Seneca hiking trail. Even though it may look safe to walk along the tracks from that point, trail users are reminded to stay on the path and only cross the tracks at the designated crossing. Finger Lakes Railway is also currently undergoing an annual review of county law enforcement contacts. The railroad dispatch department keeps a log of all emergency contacts in 6 counties. The counties coordinate emergency response through their main call centers. Most of the calls received at the 911 centers are due to false activation of lights and gates at rail crossings.

“Lights flashing without a train coming happens from time to time,” states Mark Pullen, Signals and Facility Manager for the Railway. It is a safety mechanism fail-safe that activates crossing devices if they are not functioning properly. This keeps the public safe if a train does come while the problem is being addressed. Motorists or pedestrians can also call the number located on blue signs at each public grade crossing.



About Finger Lakes Railway Corp.

Finger Lakes Railway Corp. is a Class III railroad that operates on 167 miles of track from its Geneva headquarters. They operate in 6 counties in the Finger Lakes region including Ontario, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Yates, and Schuyler. Their current customer base has grown to 89 active shippers. FGLK connects with CSX, Norfolk Southern, Canadian Pacific, and New York Susquehanna and Western Railroad. Since they began operations in 1995, they have added 55 full time employees and now have 14 locomotives. They also currently lease 581 railcars to better serve their customers needs. For more information visit www.fingerlakesrail.com

About Operation Lifesaver, Inc.

Operation Lifesaver has a network of authorized volunteer speakers and trained instructors who offer free rail safety education programs in all fifty states. Volunteers speak to school groups, driver education classes, community audiences, professional drivers, law enforcement officers, and emergency responders. Programs are co-sponsored by federal, state and local government agencies, highway safety organizations and America's railroads. Together they promote the three E's - education, enforcement and engineering - to keep people safe around the tracks and railway crossings within our communities. www.oli.org

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