



Media Relations - 215-580-7842

1234 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pa 19107-3780

Contact: Heather Redfern
Public Information Manager

SEPTA Wants Public to ‘Respect the Train’

Fifth Annual System-Wide Safety Awareness Day Educates the Region about Rail Safety

PHILADELPHIA, PA (May 17, 2017) — SEPTA’s 13 Regional Rail lines traverse 280 track miles in five southeastern Pennsylvania counties, New Jersey and Delaware, carrying 120,000 passengers every day. Thousands more Greater Philadelphia region residents live near SEPTA rail stations, tracks and grade crossings. “With so many people riding on our trains and residing near our railroad tracks, crossings and stations, it’s important that we remind the public about rail safety,” said SEPTA General Manager Jeffrey D. Knueppel.

To stress the importance of not trespassing on train tracks and track right-of-ways, not ignoring the rail crossing gates at grade crossings, and standing back from the platform edge, SEPTA made “Respect the Train” the focus of its fifth annual “Make the Safe Choice” Safety Awareness Day. During the morning rush hour on Wednesday, May 17, more than 200 Authority employees distributed educational materials and answered safety questions at almost 100 SEPTA rail, trolley and bus stations, loops and transportation centers throughout the Authority’s service area. Safety messages were also displayed in the Authority’s stations and on its vehicles.

“Rail trespassing is one of the top safety issues for transit organizations across the country,” said Knueppel. “But the majority of train related incidents are preventable by following simple rules-- stay off of the tracks, heed the warning lights and signals at grade crossings and stand back from the yellow lines on platforms.”

According to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), a person or vehicle is struck by a train about every three hours. The FRA also states that the combined railroad crossing and trespasser deaths have accounted for approximately 94% of all U.S. rail-related deaths over the past 10 years.

“Entering the track area for any reason is both dangerous and illegal,” said SEPTA Assistant General Manager of System Safety Scott Sauer. “Engineers are not expecting trespassers to be in the train’s right-of-way. And, even if an engineer sees a trespasser on tracks, the train cannot come to an immediate stop. You can’t slam on the brakes and expect a vehicle that large to stop instantaneously.”

Sauer also warns that train tracks are not the place for photo and video shoots, because a train can come in any direction at any time — no one should ever assume that there is a time when tracks are completely clear of train traffic. “Today’s trains aren’t loud — with electric vehicles and welded rails, trains no longer make that clickety-clack noise. This means you won’t know the train is coming until it’s too late to get out of the way. You should assume there could be a train coming on any track at any time.”

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Being mindful of one's location on a station platform is also important. "You can never be too rushed to be cautious," said Sauer. "Just taking a few seconds to check your surroundings, staying behind yellow lines on platforms and not running to catch a train can be the difference between life and death."

Respecting the train is also important for motorists, too.

"There are precautions that should be taken when driving near train tracks and through grade crossings," said Sauer. "When the warning signals sound and lights flash indicating that the gates are closing, drivers should not speed up and try to pass under the crossing gates. There are markers on the road that indicate the safest distance for vehicles to stop from the grade crossing when the gates are down."

Drivers that pass through flashers or crossing gates are in violation of motor vehicle laws and are subject to heavy fines. "Never travel into a crossing until the flashing lights go out completely," said Sauer. "There may be a second train coming from the opposite direction that will re-activate the gates."

To assist with spreading the message of how to "Respect the Train", SEPTA asked students from AIM Academy in Conshohocken to draw posters of what train safety means to them. The seven designs will be featured on car cards on SEPTA buses and on the Authority's website (<http://www.septa.org/safety/safety-day-2017/index.html>).

"When we give safety presentations at schools, we find that children are very responsive to our messages—they understand the importance of staying away from the tracks," said Sauer. "The AIM students did a great job conveying why you shouldn't trespass, stand too close to the edge of the platform or ignore grade crossings. Adults can learn from listening to the kids."

SEPTA's system-wide Safety Day is an extension of the Authority's "Safety Blitz" education program.

"At least once a month, our safety officers and police officers visit railroad, rail transit and bus stations across the Authority, reviewing regulations and precautions with thousands of customers," said Sauer. "We often visit locations as a result of community request or stations that have had a high volume of customers or trespassers."

SEPTA's System Safety Department also makes Operation Lifesaver rail safety presentations to students from kindergarten through high school and to a wide variety of audiences such as hearing and visually impaired adults, driver's education students, emergency responders and professional drivers. SEPTA offers the presentations — which are aimed at reducing the number of pedestrian and driver injuries and fatalities around railroad tracks by highlighting risky behaviors — free of charge to school and community groups.

For more information about SEPTA safety and to download PDFs of safety tips for all SEPTA modes, visit <http://www.septa.org/safety/tips/>. For information about SEPTA's Operation Lifesaver presentations, and to schedule a presentation, call 215-580-7800. For more information about Operation Lifesaver, visit <http://oli.org/>.

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