



CN rail safety initiative focuses on grain truck drivers

By Erin Kelly for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

‘It’ll never happen to me.’

It’s a phrase that far too many of us have thought far too often when it comes to railway incidents.

It’s that mindset the CN Police Service is looking to change with a new safety program focusing on a specific group that frequently encounter railway crossings: grain truck drivers.

After analyzing data and realizing that a significant number of incidents occurring at crossings involved professional truck drivers, CN police started looking for ways outside of enforcement to change that trend.

“You can stop vehicles, you can ticket drivers, but it is more important to change attitudes and behaviours about crossings,” says Sergeant Paul Leaden, operations supervisor for the CN Police Service’s Prairie Division, which includes Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and northwestern Ontario.

CN police, recognizing that one of the best ways to help change those attitudes would be to meet drivers in their own environment, decided to take a hands-on approach and began going out to grain elevators in the Prairie Division to speak with them directly.

“[CN police officers] are targeting the drivers while they are actually in the line loading up at the elevators,” Sgt. Leaden explains of the Grain Initiative endeavour.

“We have always been doing educational outreach, but we really shifted the focus to the grain industry and have been able to spread the safety message to these drivers in a very positive way.”





Much of the safety messaging relayed to drivers is about the capabilities of trains – such as train stopping time (it takes roughly 1,850 metres for the average train to stop) and the warning signals to watch for at crossings. The information serves to heighten overall awareness about trains, as well as help drivers anticipate rail movements when they are approaching tracks.

In addition to visiting grain elevators, CN police have also been going to weigh scale locations and collaborating with driver training schools in order to spread the safety messaging widely.

“Our goal is to have zero incidents, and so we are trying to be as proactive as we can. We want to prevent incidents from ever happening rather than responding to them and dealing with them after the fact,” says Sgt. Leaden.

As Sgt. Leaden points out, an essential part of reaching and maintaining that goal is community engagement. While professional truck drivers are the target audience for this particular program, the initiative undoubtedly helps build greater rail safety awareness throughout communities where train tracks and grain facilities are commonplace.

“The community engagement is a number one priority for us because our tracks run through communities across the country,” he explains. “With our outreach, we try to encompass as many different components of the community as we can to provide safety education.”

Though it’s too early for detailed data on the results of the Grain Initiative, which launched in September 2018, there are some indications that it’s contributing to positive changes. In fact, it’s been a full year since a railway incident occurred involving any professional driver across CN’s Prairie Division.

But according to Sgt. Leaden, that good news doesn’t mean CN police officers will be slowing down with this initiative anytime soon.





“We are really excited about that, but we’re not going to take our foot off the gas. If anything, we’re going to be pushing this program more because we truly believe that we are making strides,” he explains.

“Because when it comes to numbers, just one incident is too many. At the end of the day, we all want to go home safely.”

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is a public campaign held annually during the third week of March that focuses on the importance of safe agriculture. The 2020 campaign, Safe & Strong Farms: Grow an AgSafe Canada, takes place March 15-21. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information, visit agsafetyweek.ca.

