

Iowa's portable locomotive

“Portable” and “locomotive” aren’t words typically used in the same sentence. In the interest of promoting rail safety, the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) supported the development of a locomotive simulator designed inside a trailer. The trailer is promoted by the rail safety group, Operation Lifesaver (OL), and was recently showcased at the Iowa Operation Lifesaver annual conference in Ames April 20.

David Huntley, who works for the UP in Boone, and his wife, Kit, use the trailer as a portable classroom to teach about railroading and especially rail safety. “The trailer takes two people to run, one with a 10-minute presentation outside with slides and videos, and the other inside for about 10 minutes,” said Huntley. The controls inside the trailer simulate an actual locomotive with real-life scenarios played out on a big-screen monitor in front of the controls. “There are a few close calls on that video, things people may not expect,” he said. “It’s the real view from the crew. It can be a very eye-opening experience since most people have never seen what we see everyday from the controls of a locomotive.”



This locomotive simulator allows people to see the view from a real train engine while learning about rail crossing safety.



The interior of the trailer simulates the view from a locomotive.

Huntley says the trailer is taken to drivers’ education classes, safety camps and any place where people are interested in learning about rail safety. “Whoever crosses the tracks needs to hear these messages,” explained Huntley. The presentations are free of charge and all presenters donate their time to the program.

The Huntleys have been OL presenters for the past decade, but the trailer has only been part of their program for a year or so. “It is sponsored by OL,” said Huntley, “and put together by the people at UP.”

About OL

OL started in Idaho in 1972 when the national average of collisions at highway-rail grade crossings exceeded 12,000 annually. A six-week public awareness campaign called “Operation Lifesaver” was sponsored by the office of Governor Cecil Andrus, the Idaho Peace Officers and UP as a one-time, one-state initiative.

During the campaign’s first year, Idaho’s crossing-related fatalities dropped by 43 percent. The next year, OL spread to Nebraska, where the collision rate was reduced by 26 percent. Kansas and Georgia experienced similar success the following year.

Between 1978 and 1986, while OL operated under the auspices of the National Safety Council (NSC), all 49 continental states started independent OL programs. In 1986, the national program was released from NSC and incorporated as a national, non-profit, 501(c)(3) educational organization. The founding sponsors - Operation Lifesaver Inc. (OLI), the Railway Progress Institute, Amtrak, and the Association of American Railroads - continue to serve on OLI’s 11-member board of directors. Today, OL programs are active in 49 states nationwide.

For more information on the OL trailer, contact David Huntley at 515-433-5693 or dehuntley@up.com.