

HIGHWAY—RAIL CROSSING SAFETY

Bruce A. Uselman—Chief of Police

The City of Wadena was established as a result of the railroad commerce and the ability to ship goods by trains. We have grown accustomed to the daily train traffic which has increased substantially over the years. Due to this increase in train traffic we have also become somewhat complacent in our attitude towards trains.

Expect a train at any time. A train may appear at a crossing at any time of day or night. Freight trains don't travel on a regular schedule and the schedules for passenger trains can change. Trains will appear to be approaching more slowly than they really are. If you see a train, wait for it to pass. Don't try to beat the train and never attempt to drive between the cross arms. Each year many people are killed attempting to beat the train. **Always look** before crossing any rail road crossing. If you look both ways before crossing all railroad crossings, you will not make the deadly mistake of failing to look at the many uncontrolled crossings across the country. After fully applying the brakes, a loaded freight train traveling at 55 miles an hour takes a mile or more to stop. Even if the engineer can see you, it's too late to stop the train in time to prevent a collision.

If the gates are down, the road is closed and you must stop and wait. The law states that motorists must stop at the flashing red lights of a railroad crossing. If you have time to safely stop as is the case in all red traffic lights, then you must stop. Continue across after the gates go up and the red lights stop flashing. **Check all tracks before crossing.** If you are at a crossing with more than one set of tracks, be very careful after a train passes. Another deadly mistake occurs when one train passes in one direction and the motorist fails to observe the second train traveling in the opposite direction. This often again occurs where railroad cross arms are not in place at the crossing. The first train can hide the second train.

Never drive onto the railroad crossing until you're sure you can clear the tracks on the other side without stopping. If your car stalls or is trapped on the tracks, get everyone out right away, even if you don't see a train coming. Move quickly away from the tracks. If a train is coming, move in its direction as you move away from the tracks. If you run in the same direction as the train you could be injured by flying debris when the vehicle is struck by the train.

Don't trespass on the railroad property. Tracks and the property alongside them—the right-of-way are private property. Stay off railroad cars and tracks. It is unlawful to trespass and too often it's deadly. Parents should warn their children about serious consequences and dangers of trespassing on railroad property. People are walking with headsets covering their ears and are unable to hear the approaching trains, or are preoccupied in fishing off bridges or playing and not paying attention to the tracks. Snowmobilers and operators of ATV's also risk not hearing the trains as a result of engine noise and helmets covering the ears.

People often misjudge the speed of trains and think the train is farther away and moving slower than it actually is. Railroad bridges and areas between buildings give the appearance that there is room to walk. But there's only room enough for the train and approximately three feet of clearance. Rail cars carry chains, and straps which can loosen and swing out from the cargo striking anything in the right-of-way. Loose cargo, or objects placed on the railroad tracks can have devastating results as the heavy wheels shoot the objects out with deadly force. Throwing objects at trains can have similar consequences, in that they can glance off the speeding rail cars. Each year the railroad companies investigate criminal activity involving vandalism to railroad property.

We should always be alert when crossing any railroad right-of-way and talk with our children and young adults about the dangers that exist in these areas. ■



YOUR ELECTRIC UTILITY

David Evans—Electric & Water Superintendent

With all of the news recently about rising taxes, Fiscal Cliffs and debt ceilings I wanted to remind City residents about some good things. The City of Wadena Electric Department has not had an electric rate increase since May 1, 2009 and it is our goal to hold that rate through 2014. This has made our rates very competitive with surrounding electric providers as shown in the graphs below.

During this same time the City has made a substantial investment in our electric distribution system by burying overhead circuits, adding loop feeds, upgrading voltage and adding substation capacity in order to make our system more reliable and robust to prepare for future growth. In the midst of the best of plans Mother Nature threw in the tornado of June 2010 causing the rebuilding of one third of our distribution system.

In the near future we are planning on installing an automated meter reading system in order to give our customers more timely and easily accessible usage information so you can make better decisions on your energy use.

All this has been accomplished by responsible spending, acquiring mitigation grants and being true to our core purpose of providing the City of Wadena residents with reliable service at the lowest rates thru a locally owned not for profit Municipal Utility. ■

