

Safety and Security

At the Alaska Railroad (ARRC), *Working Together Safely* means that our employees, customers and business partners combine efforts to deliver services in the safest manner possible. ARRC will achieve this vision through:

- Establishing a culture that makes safety our highest priority, that sets rigorous standards for safety excellence, and that is open to self-assessment and employee engagement.
- A work environment where all known safety and environmental hazards will be eliminated or safeguarded.
- A workforce trained and educated to take responsibility for environmental integrity, their personal safety, the safety of fellow employees, and the communities we serve.
- Shared values that emphasize mutual respect and equal opportunity for all employees.

Operation Lifesaver

Operation Lifesaver (OL) is a non-profit public education program that uses a nationwide network of volunteers to educate people about rail safety. Established in 1972, Operation Lifesaver's mission supports state programs, educational brochures and videos, instructional information and other materials for audiences of all ages to prevent collisions, deaths and injuries at places where roadways cross train tracks and on railroad rights-of-way (ROW). With state coordinators in all 50 states, OL programs are sponsored cooperatively by federal, state and local government agencies; highway safety organizations and railroads. In Alaska, ARRC sponsors OL activities and an ARRC employee volunteers

as Alaska's OL state coordinator. ARRC supports efforts to re-organize and expand OL educational programs along the Alaska railbelt to include cooperative ventures with public safety and school organizations. 2013 was a banner year, thanks to a \$26,000 *Summer Rail Safety Campaign* funded two-thirds by a national OL grant and one-third by ARRC. Volunteers reached nearly 12,000 residents with face-to-face interaction at public events. The campaign also spread OL safety messages with signs on public buses, locomotives, and along trails; through a governor's proclamation and via public service announcements on radio, at baseball games and in a local newspaper; and with bumper stickers, flyers and lapel pins. Elements of the campaign are repeated in subsequent years, pending funding availability.

TrackWatch Program

ARRC, in cooperation with the Transportation Security Administration, promotes *TrackWatch*, a public awareness and education campaign. The *TrackWatch* program asks Alaska Railroad neighbors, employees, customers and passengers to report suspicious activity around railroad tracks and property, or situations that could pose a danger to railroad operations. The program is patterned after the successful *Neighborhood Watch* program initiated in communities across the country. ARRC has created an information card to help employees and neighbors to become involved in this safety and security partnership. Passengers contribute to the security equation by providing thousands of extra eyes and ears while at our depots or onboard our trains. In short, *TrackWatch* fosters a first line of defense against natural or man-made disasters.



One of two locomotives are outfitted with an "Always Expect a Train" decal.

Vegetation Control

Vegetation control is required by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the agency responsible for regulating U.S. railroad safety. Vegetation management is necessary to ensure the track is visible for safety inspections, to remove obstructions that block line-of-sight or obscure signs and signals; to reduce tripping hazards, and to prevent accelerated deterioration of the track and track bed. Mechanical and manual vegetation control methods alone have not been sufficient to meet FRA and safety requirements. For this reason, from 2009 to 2012, ARRC applied for and received Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) permits to integrate herbicide weed control into our vegetation management program. Beginning in 2013, the railroad follows new ADEC regulations that require an integrated vegetation management plan and public notice when using herbicides along the rail system. ARRC hires a railroad vegetation control expert to use specialized equipment with low-volume, low-pressure, ground-directed application to target only the track bed and operating yards. ARRC avoids application in waterways.

Right-of-Way Protection

The primary purpose of the railroad ROW is to operate trains; it is intended to provide maximum public protection from safety risks inherent in railroad operations. With increasing train speeds and volumes, particularly in areas with higher population density, it is increasingly important to maintain a clear ROW. State law also requires the ROW to be preserved for transportation, communication and transmission purposes, including underground and overhead utilities. ARRC will continue to strictly evaluate the suitability and safety of activities allowed in the ROW by permit. The time may come when the FRA mandates – or safety concerns dictate – fencing the ROW to provide greater train operations and public safety.

In the meantime, ARRC has taken proactive steps to increase boundary visibility and promote public awareness of the ROW as a railroad utility and safety corridor. In 2011, ARRC delineated (marked) the ROW boundary through Anchorage, from Potter to Elmendorf, by installing durable 6-foot blue posts every 200 feet to physically indicate the boundary through the area. Delineation augments the U.S. Survey monuments that currently mark the ROW boundary. ARRC will consider ROW delineation in other areas of dense population as appropriate.

Trails in ARRC Right-of-Way

In general, a railroad ROW is not a safe or appropriate location for a trail. However, ARRC may consider use of ROW for trails in rare instances where no feasible alternatives exist. The railroad also recognizes the role trail access plays in some rural areas. Because any trail within the ROW would expose the public to substantial risk, and ARRC to substantial liability, such trails must be constructed to specifically mitigate these risks. By state statute, trails on ARRC land must not negatively impact railroad operations, they must be maintained and insured by an entity other than ARRC, and that entity must agree to indemnify ARRC for all related claims. All trails must be approved by the ARRC Board of Directors, which has full and final discretion over trail requests. Within those restrictions, ARRC can sometimes accommodate portions of a trail in the outer 30 feet of ROW if the trail is properly planned. The railroad encourages municipal planners to include ARRC at the earliest stages of trail planning.

Avalanche Mitigation

ARRC has made significant investments in equipment, state-of-the-art technology, research and expertise to mitigate avalanche risk, particularly along slide-prone areas between Anchorage and Seward. The railroad has worked with the Alaska Department of Transportation, U.S. Forest Service, Weather Service and other public safety organizations to reduce uncertainty and hazardous conditions. Efforts include: **1**) data acquisition upgrades (weather stations, avalanche detection equipment, and avalanche data management computer systems, etc.); **2**) explosive delivery systems to facilitate controlled slides (howitzer sites and hyrail equipment, etc.); and **3**) snow-clearing equipment. The investments have improved safety for people traveling by rail and by highway.



A Howitzer gun is used to trigger a controlled slide.