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► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#) (web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

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► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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Gold Line Collisions Prompt Mass Safety Mailing to Neighborhoods

- Almost 47,000 safety reminders sent after two September collisions

By NED RACINE

(Oct. 10, 2007) In response to two September collisions between automobiles and Metro Gold Line trains, Transit Safety mailed almost 47,000 safety reminders this month to residents along stretches of the Gold Line.

The two-color poster features a photo of a collision between an SUV and a Metro light rail car. The posters were mailed Oct. 5 to every household in Highland Park, Mount Washington and Lincoln Heights.

Written in both English and Spanish, the posters reminded Gold Line neighbors of their role in transit safety, including the fines for violating safety laws.

"It's a refresher," explained Barbara Burns, regional communications manager, who has led the Transit Education and Safety group for four years.

"To have no accidents of consequence since it opened and then to have two within 10 days [Sept. 11 and 21], we wanted to get that refresher out there now," Burns explained. According to Burns, her team thought, "Hey, we've got to do more; we've got to wake them up; we've got to get their attention again."

Ignoring rules and consequences

"The Gold Line has been open since 2003 and people get used to it," Burns said. "Apparently it begins to blend into the background, and [drivers] start ignoring the rules as well as the consequences."

Burns and her team were nearby when the Sept. 21 collision occurred. "That day we were two blocks away at Monte Vista Elementary School doing school presentations." The presentation ended because news helicopters circling above the accident were making too much noise for the children to hear.



Transit Safety mailed almost 47,000 of these safety reminders on Oct. 5 to remind residents along stretches of the Metro Gold Line of their role in transit safety. The mailing followed two collisions in September between automobiles and Gold Line trains.

Besides its school presentations, the Transit Education Safety group reaches adults by giving presentations to community groups and attending community events. "We do ask the students to take the [safety] message home to their parents and we know that they do," Burns said.

Six people were injured and transported to area hospitals in a Sept. 11 collision between a Gold Line train and a pickup truck just before 8 a.m. That collision, which derailed the Gold Line train, occurred about a block and a half south of the Highland Park station at the intersection of Marmion Way and Avenue 55.

Ten days later, an SUV broadsided a Metro Gold Line train during the Friday morning rush hour today, causing a fire and injuring six people. The train was heading north to Pasadena when it was struck shortly after 7 a.m. at the Ave. 50 and Marmion Way intersection crossing in the Mount Washington area.

'System requires vigilance'

"Living near a rail system requires vigilance, but people become de-sensitized and begin to behave irresponsibly. That kind of self-absorption can result in severe consequences. " Burns emphasized. "They have to abide by the safety rules. If there are gates, wait."

Burns believes drivers are simply distracted and trying to do too many things simultaneously in their cars. She scoffs at drivers who break safety laws to save time.

"We run so frequently and our trains are so short that it takes less than a minute for the arm to come down, the train to go by and the arm to go up again. There is no reason to try to beat [the train]."

Drawing on her experience in promoting rail safety, Burns cites drivers making illegal left turns and ignoring descending crossing gates as the main causes of rail accidents.

She also believes drivers and pedestrians begin treating the train as just another car. "Maybe that's because our trains are so short; I don't know. People also forget that a train isn't a car. It can't stop on a dime and it can't swerve off the tracks."