

Federal Railroad Administration's Train Horn & Quiet Zone Rule

On April 27, 2005, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) published the Final Rule on the Use of Locomotive Horns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings. Effective June 24, 2005, the Final Rule requires that locomotive horns be sounded at all public grade crossings 15-20 seconds before entering a crossing, but not more than one-quarter mile in advance. The pattern for blowing the horn remains two long, one short, and one long sounding to be repeated as necessary until the locomotive clears the crossing. Locomotive engineers will retain the authority to vary this pattern as necessary for crossings in close proximity and will be allowed to sound the horn in emergency situations. The Final Rule preempts any state or local laws regarding the use of the train horn at public crossings.

Quiet Zones

The Final Rule also provides public authorities the option to maintain and/or establish quiet zones provided certain supplemental or alternative safety measures are in place and the crossing accident rate meets FRA standards. There are six types of quiet zones:

- A Pre-Rule Quiet Zone (Full or Partial) is a quiet zone that was established before October 9, 1996, and in place as of December 18, 2003.
- An Intermediate Quiet Zone is a quiet zone that was established after October 9, 1996, but before December 18, 2003.
- New Quiet Zones are those that do not meet the criteria for Pre-Rule or Intermediate Quiet Zones.
- Full Quiet Zones are zones where the horn is silenced 24 hours per day.
- Conversely, Partial Quiet Zones are quiet zones where the horn is silenced for only a portion of the day, typically between the hours of 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Pursuant to the rule, public authorities wanting to maintain Pre-Rule or Intermediate Quiet Zones were required to submit a Notice of Continuation in accordance with the rule by June 3, 2005. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in the sounding of the train horn beginning Friday, June 24, 2005, and continuing for 21 days from the date the Notice of Continuation is properly filed.

Quiet zones in the six-county Chicago, Illinois Region (Cook, DuPage, Lake, Kane, McHenry and Will Counties) which were in existence as of December 18, 2003, are currently exempted by the Final Rule.

Public authorities wishing to establish New Quiet Zones must submit Notices of Intent and Establishment in accordance with the rule. Public authorities should refer to the Final Rule for specific guidelines on the quiet zone establishment process. The Final Rule and FRA explanatory materials can be found on the FRA's Web site.

Union Pacific's Involvement in the Quiet Zone Establishment Process

Having a railroad's safety perspective throughout the quiet zone establishment process is recommended; therefore, Union Pacific Railroad will actively participate in quiet zone projects affecting Union Pacific rail lines. Union Pacific representatives will participate in diagnostic meetings and provide the necessary railroad information required in the Final Rule.

The Final Rule outlines two types of safety improvement options for upgrading a quiet zone to meet FRA safety standards:

- Supplemental Safety Measures (SSMs) or
- Alternative Safety Measures (ASMs).

Supplemental Safety Measures include the following:

- Four-Quadrant Gate Systems
- Medians or Channelization Devices
- One-Way Streets with Gates

- Permanent Closure

Alternative Safety Measure include:

- Modified SSMs (i.e. Non-Complying Medians, Three-Quadrant Gates, etc.)
- Engineered ASMs (i.e. Geometric Improvements)
- Non-Engineered ASMs (i.e. Programmed Enforcement, Photo Enforcement, Education, etc.)

Union Pacific encourages the use of Engineered SSMs, but asks that communities postpone taking any costly or irreversible action until it has been determined which additional safety measures are warranted.