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A car waits at the railroad track crossing at Pershing Avenue Wednesday as a special Union Pacific engine carrying UP Police and local law enforcement officers travels up and down the tracks in Liberal watching for vehicles that try to cross as the crossing arms are being lowered and driving around them once they are completely down. Within a few hours, at least six drivers were ticketed for failing to stop when the signal lights and crossing arms were initiated.
L&T photo/Giseelle Arredondo

Union Pacific program catches drivers ignoring deadly warnings

By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

• Leader & Times

Even with the Liberal police officers parked in plain sight, drivers didn't fail to zip around, run into and get trapped between railroad crossing arms as they were being lowered Wednesday.

Union Pacific Railroad Police and local law enforcement officers rode together in a UP engine

to observe motorists' behavior at the railroad grade crossings in Liberal.

The purpose behind the scheduled train rides was to educate the public about grade crossings and pedestrian safety with the hopes to, in turn, reduce the number of accidents.

Law officials also had a chance to see what the locomotive engineers deal with on a daily basis.

These type of activities are exercised only every couple of years. In the past, another activity that has been done to give the people a reality check is ramming into a vehicle with the train and then hauling it around for people to see.



Afterward, it is taken down to the state fair and placed on display.

"You see a lot of interesting stuff here at the railroad," the conductor of the train, Matt Hoffman, said, "There have been two deaths here (in Liberal in the past)."

Some may wonder how could one go as far as not seeing a train that is only a few seconds away?

Sometimes, vehicle drivers are distracted, according to Hoffman.

"They will have their radios too loud, and they can't hear the whistle blowing. They are unaware.

That's how they get killed," he said. "Others think they can beat a 70 mph train. Country roads have signs only and many times the drivers don't make those stops."

A blue pickup ran into the train gate by Seward County's Waste Management Services, at the Eighth Street track crossing. Those riding the train concluded that the driver was texting while driving.

Legally, it is only required for a train to make a 10 minute stop and after the stop is made, the locomotives just have to wait and observe if people cross the gates.

From 8 a.m. until noon, more than six vehicles were pulled over and tickets were issued for about \$150 each.

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