

Motorist walks away after being struck by train

By MEGHAN MOESLEIN The Warren Sentinel

FRONT ROYAL — The day after Christmas brought quite a shock to Ramona I. Bowden, 81, of Front Royal, after her 2006 Chrysler PT Cruiser was struck by a Norfolk Southern train at the intersection of Marys Shady Lane and Happy Creek Road.

“Bowden’s vehicle was considered a total loss by police with an estimated \$12,000 in damages. The train received minor damage, estimated to be approximately \$500 in damage,” Front Royal Chief of Police Richard Furr said. **“Bowden was taken to Warren Memorial Hospital after the crash. The train was estimated to be traveling at approximately 30 mph at the time of the crash.”**

Although a frightening reality for Bowden, she is not alone, with many accidents occurring in the same fashion “more frequently than they should,” Furr said.

“The railroad industry constantly reminds drivers to exercise due caution at any grade crossing, whether controlled by ‘active’ devices — gates, lights, bells — or ‘passive’ devices — signs, road markings,” said Furr. **“Drivers are reminded to stop and make sure there are no approaching trains in either direction before continuing across the tracks.”**

Although road conditions may have played a part in Bowden’s crash, many other motorists have also fallen pray to the tough area between Marys Shady Lane and Happy Creek Road.

“There is considerable traffic at this crossing as it is the only access to Shenandoah River Estates subdivision. There is also an uphill grade when approaching the crossing from the subdivision with reduced sight distance caused by the nearby terrain,” Furr said.

With reduced visibility the intersection can often become overbearing, but trains are required to sound a horn and keep the front of the train well lit in the event that a car gets stuck in its path. In this instance the operator of the train that struck Bowden confirmed that they had sounded the horn “several times before the collision” and that the front of the train was lit, Furr said.

“Remember that when your windows are up, sounds from outside the vehicle are harder to hear. If you have snow or ice on your windows, that can also reduce your visibility. You need to do everything possible to make sure that it is safe to cross the railroad tracks,” said Furr. **“Bowden was very fortunate in this crash as most people do not survive vehicle collisions with a train.”**

Furr suggests all motorists take some time and “check out” Operation Lifesaver on the web, www.oli.org, “as it could save their, or a family member’s life.”