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What is the Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest?

Projects happen around the world that involve children and youth producing short movies in order to highlight local child safety issues. The Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest encourages children and youth to produce short movies promoting rail safety in a way meaningful to them. Armed with a phone camera or a video camera and knowledge about a particular safety issue, be it pedestrian safety or being safe around railway tracks, children and youth are encouraged to film issues of concern to them, with the supervision of adults. This contest can also be used to illustrate a participant’s new level of awareness and knowledge regarding safe surroundings and behaviour.

Why Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest?

The Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest can be used as a tool for community engagement on safety issues for a number of reasons:

- It provides an excellent educational platform for children to absorb safety information in an active and engaging manner.

- It positively engages children, parents, teachers, leaders and community members in identifying hazards in their community and exploring possible solutions.

- Videos made by children can be used as a starting point for greater community awareness and potential advocacy initiatives.

- It empowers children to learn about filming while discovering and understanding the importance of behavioural and environmental issues in relation to safety.
Objectives:

• To educate children and youth about the rules for safety around trains and railway tracks, including the dangers of trespassing.

• To empower children and youth to demonstrate their knowledge and capacities through a creative experience, specifically using filming as a tool to document their perspectives on rail safety.

Necessary materials:

The only necessary equipment is a video camera of some sort. This can be a digital or film camera, or a cell phone video camera. The instructor leading the pre-sessions may want to use a white board, chalk board or presentation paper to explain basic videography rules, and the safety rules and features that children will be adhering to and looking for on their video field trips.

What makes a good video?

Leaders may choose to present some basic information about making a video before filming. This will add value to the project by increasing participants understanding of filming and enhancing the quality of the videos created.

Three steps to making a good video:

Step One: Planning

Preparing for your video and planning ahead of time will help you stay organized and provide you with a guideline for when you are filming. Create a storyboard and timeline for your video, keeping in mind that 3 minutes is a good length for the video.
It’s a great idea to work on a script with the students/children prior to filming. Think about the main message, theme or story of your video.

This may change while you are filming or editing, but it will provide a good guide for the process. Some questions to ask yourself before you start:

• What is your main message, theme or story?
• Have you prepared a script?
• Where will you film your video?
• Have you recruited ‘actors’? Have they signed Right to Publicity Release Form (see page 5 of the Contest Information guide)
• Do you need any props for filming to get your message across? Are the props you’ve chosen easily understandable by people outside of your immediate area?
• Do you have all the necessary equipment and software for filming and editing?
• Have you arranged a sufficient number of adult supervisors to guide the activity safely (we recommend one adult supervisor for every four or five children)

**Step Two: Filming**

Keep these points in mind while filming:

• Are you following the plan and storyboard you prepared?
• Are you varying shooting techniques (panning, close ups, zooms – see appendix for explanations) to help convey your message or story in an interesting way?
• Are the actors, script and props able to convey the message you originally planned?

Your piece should be original and not contain copyrighted materials (brand logos, music, other video footage) without permission.

**Step Three: Editing**

With your video planned and filmed, editing is the final step to bring all the pieces together. Try and ensure that your final version displays shots that flow seamlessly together in a logical sense. Clear sound and audio, and appropriate music choices (if used) are worked on in this part of the process. The final product should accurately convey your message.

Adapted from the No Regrets “Is it worth it?” multi-media competition guide
The Ethics of Videography:

Videography projects with children and youth should include a discussion about ethics and the potential risks to participants. Be sure to discuss issues such as respecting community members and personal safety.

Respecting community members

Participants must remember to respect the privacy and rights of members of the community. Leaders of the Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest should include discussions about ways to protect personal privacy. Participants should not take pictures of others without their consent, or pictures of people’s homes that are easily identifiable.

Personal safety

Leaders can help children to be aware of risks, including physical harm and loss of privacy to participants and subjects. No picture is worth taking if it endangers the photographer or subject! Teach safe strategies to minimize risk including clearly establishing that trespassing on to rail property is not permitted.

Rail Safety Rules:

Under no circumstances should any contest participants go on private railroad property or close to the train tracks in order to take a picture of ‘what not to do on the tracks’. Safety should be an utmost priority during this exercise. If children wish to demonstrate dangerous behavior, suggest that they create a mock-up in the park or playground. For example, chock lines or lined-up pool noodles could represent the railway.
Children and youth making videos may want to consider making videos that demonstrate safe behaviours. In addition, other images of interest may include different types of rail signage, a passing train (taken while the videographer is standing well back from the closed gates) or the flashing lights on the gate. The photos taken and videos made during the Tips for Trains Contest outings may be used to reinforce safe behaviours, or to advocate for environmental changes. If young videographers find examples of missing or damaged signage, this would be an opportunity to use the picture to advocate for changes to the community.

10 lessons that every child should know in order to stay safe around railway tracks:

• **Don’t take shortcuts.** If you are not crossing at a designated crossing, you are trespassing. This is dangerous and illegal. Walk to a designated crossing.

• **Cross at the right place and time.** The only place to cross at railway tracks is at a designated crossing. Do not try to cross the tracks when the flashing lights have come on and the gate is down.

• **Obey the signals.** Never walk around a closed gate. At designated crossings, flashing light signals and gates activate only 20 seconds before the train reaches the crossing. This is not enough time to cross the track.

• **Make sure the way is clear.** When you cross railway tracks, stop, look and listen before crossing.

• **A train cannot stop as quickly as a car.** A train needs much more time and space to come to a complete stop than a car needs. Unlike a car, a train cannot swerve to avoid a collision.

• **Never try to outrun a train.** Trains are closer and are moving faster than you realize. The average 150-car freight train is traveling 100 km/h.

• **Stand 16 feet or five meters back from the rail.** Objects can fall from trains. Stand at least 16 feet or 5 meters back from the tracks to avoid getting hit by falling objects.

• **Check for a second train.** If one train passes, make sure a second train isn’t following behind or approaching on another track. Wait until the first train has passed and then make sure both tracks are clear before crossing.
• **Never ride a bicycle over train tracks.** The wheels can get caught in the track and you could fall off your bicycle. Always walk your bicycle across the tracks when it is safe to cross.

• **Do not trespass.** Railway property is private property. Playing on railway tracks and bridges is dangerous and illegal. It is against the law to trespass on railway property.

**Implementing Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest:**

It is up to you to decide how to best implement this contest in your community. Below are suggested sessions; however each of these does not need to be covered separately. You may want to combine a few sessions together depending on your timelines. The following elements can be included in the implementation of your Tips for Trains Contest:

**Introduction to Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest:**

The introductory session is an opportunity to launch the Tips for Trains Contest, and explain objectives and processes. This time can also be used to look at appropriate examples of other topic-related videos (possibly on YouTube) and have a discussion about what makes a good video, or a discussion about videography can be a separate session.

**Introduction to filming:**

Talk about the basic principles of filming. Examples of different filming techniques, such as close ups, portraits and action shots can be used to illustrate the discussion. To make this session participatory, ask children to bring in an example of a video they are drawn to i.e. YouTube or a personal video. They can discuss how the videos are
composed and what makes them interesting. This session is also a time to discuss the ethics of filming.

**Discussion about rail safety:**

Children should participate in a guided discussion which introduces and reinforces rules that everyone needs to follow to be safe around trains and railway tracks (see Rail Safety Rules section). Explore participants’ views about rail safety – they may have first hand experiences to share, or stories about others. Resources such as the Parachute’s Safe Crossing Program lesson plans, which can be downloaded here: [http://www.parachutecanada.org/programs/topic/C69](http://www.parachutecanada.org/programs/topic/C69) may be helpful. As an option, during this session, the group could create a walking map of the safe routes to follow during the observational field trip. Another optional activity for this session is to use the rail safety scenarios included in this manual (see Appendix A), as the basis for discussion or creative presentations. Appendix B, a rail safety checklist, provides you with some elements to check for to ensure a crossing is safe.

**Observational Field Trip:**

An observational field trip is an important part of the Tips for Trains Contest experience, however participants should be monitored to ensure that they are not engaging in unsafe behaviors while observing trains and railways tracks and filming. Ideally, there should be a group of four or five children for every adult supervisor. Another option with this session is to have two observational field trips. The preliminary outing could involve a walkabout to choose possible video locations while discussing safe behaviour and a subsequent trip to make the videos. Use the group outing as an opportunity to model and discuss general safe pedestrian behavior.

**Debrief and Slideshow:**

This is an opportunity to discuss the experiences of the observational field trip, including what participants saw and felt, and to reinforce safe behaviours when close to trains and railway tracks. A slideshow or sampling of video clips can be organized to view all the videos made during the observational field trip. Some guiding questions for the discussion could include asking the participants why they chose to take videos, to describe the environment seen in the video, and based on the video, why it is important to be safe.
After Implementation:

The final product will be submitted via YouTube or email (to jtaylor@parachutecanada.org) to be judged by our panel. Once the judges have identified the shortlisted entries, the top videos will be highlighted on the Parachute website. Parachute will be working to spread the word through traditional and social media channels. The top three prizes will be determined through a combination of judges scores and voting.

If during your observational field trip and subsequent discussions, you identify an area of concern, we encourage you to contact the CN police. They can be reached at 1-800-465-9239. If the rail property is not CN owned, the owner information and contacts will be posted onsite. Please contact the owner of the crossing as appropriate.

Remember, Parachute staff are always ready to help out and answer any questions you may have via phone call, email. Happy filming!

Photo by Lisa Gilbert
APPENDIX A

Scenarios for discussion in Tips for Trains Rail Safety Contest “What Would You Do?”

This activity encourages children and youth to creatively address real-life situations, while recognizing the conflicting emotions that dangerous situations can present. The primary goal is to generate open discussion. Arriving at a satisfactory solution may be challenging, but an answer that includes going on the tracks must be ultimately addressed as unsafe and unacceptable.

Divide the children into small groups, and assign each group a different situation, either as handouts, or written on flipchart paper with space to write or illustrate their thoughts underneath. Children will read their group’s scenario and discuss how they might react and explore safe options. They can record their reactions and possible solutions with words or pictures or even act out their solution as a short play.

Hypothetical Situations:

A. Jason is walking home from school. He looks down the street just as his neighbour’s dog squeezes through a fence and onto the railway tracks. Jason knows this dog really well, and has even looked after it when his neighbours go on holiday. He is upset to see the dog on the railway tracks! What would you do in Jason’s situation?

B. Melissa and her friends are late for school and someone suggests that they take the short cut across the tracks. Taking the short cut will mean the difference between arriving before the bell, or having to report to the office to get a late slip. As the group approaches the short cut Melissa starts to feel really uncomfortable,
as she has been taught that to cross the tracks is extremely dangerous AND against the law. What would you do if you were her?

C. Sam is being hired by his uncle, to deliver weekly flyers for a family business and he is happy to have a chance to make a little money. Sam’s cousin Wayne, a grade 12 student, is showing Sam the route and giving him tips. Sam is surprised to learn that part of the route includes using a dirt path that leads right across the neighbourhood railway tracks, which Wayne has been using for years to reach houses that the business wants to access. Wayne explains this is the best way to deliver the flyers efficiently; otherwise it takes twice as long to go several blocks to the pedestrian crossing. Sam hesitates as they reach the gap in the chain link fencing. What would you do in Sam’s situation?

D. Diane, a grade six student, has been a member of her school’s “green club” for years. This year’s parent volunteer, Mr. Mitchell needs an extra set of hands, as he heads to the garden centre a couple of blocks away, with two wagons to pick up soil and mulch. Diane is happy to help. As they are returning to school with their loaded wagons, they approach the neighbourhood level railway crossing just as the bell sounds and the gate drops. Mr. Mitchell gestures to Diane to hurry up so they can beat the train. As he jogs forward, pulling his wagon behind him, he shouts back to Diane that they have plenty of time to beat the train and there’s no way he want to wait for it to pass! Diane feels heavy in the pit of her stomach as she nervously watches Mr. Mitchell start to navigate around the gate. She glances at the train…it doesn’t look that close. What would you do in Diane’s situation?
APPENDIX B

Checklist for Rail Safety

Observe the area around the neighbourhood train tracks and at the railway crossing and look for the following:

✓ Are there gaps in fences or graffiti that indicates trespassing?
✓ Is there a dirt path (monkey trail) that people have been using?
✓ Have people been observed behaving unsafely? If so, in what way?

At a rail crossing:

✓ Does signage indicate that there is a rail crossing?
✓ Is there a clearly drawn area to cross the tracks?

When a train is approaching:

✓ Are there barriers and do they work? Do lights flash and does a signal sound?
✓ Do pedestrians, cyclists and drivers behave safely when a train is approaching?
✓ How far back are people standing while the train passes by?
✓ Have any safe or unsafe behaviours been noted down?