

<u>Measure Name</u>	Policy for managing death memorials
<u>Definition</u>	Develop policies for the removal or relocation of death memorials on railroad property.
<u>Tags</u>	
<i>Incident Type</i>	Both trespass and suicide
<i>Location</i>	Both station and right-of-way
<i>Intervention Strategy</i>	Enforcement: policy development and rulemaking
<i>Measure Group</i>	Post-incident management

Description

This measure seeks to develop policies to remove or relocate death memorials, such as candles and photographs of an individual killed on railroad property and encourages individuals to memorialize their loved ones in a safe way, away from the railroad. Policies may be coordinated between the railroad and the local community.

A death memorial can prime some individuals with suicidal intent to think about or act on their suicidal ideation [1]. This should be considered when coordinating the removal of memorials, especially if incidents continue to occur within the same community, resulting in a cluster/hotspot. Memorials can also remind railroad employees of past incidents that they witnessed, which may be traumatic. Locating memorials away from railroad property can mitigate these effects and decrease trespassing by reducing the number of individuals visiting the memorial site.

As of 2024, there is no research on the effects of death memorials along the railroad for suicidal individuals. However, roadside death memorials have been deemed illegal in some states (such as California and New York) and legal in others (such as Maine and Massachusetts). In regard to permitting or prohibiting memorials, states have considered factors such as how close memorials are to the railroad tracks, if they are environmentally friendly (e.g., if the materials are non-biodegradable or hazardous), or if they require ongoing maintenance (e.g., those who maintain the memorials may become safety hazards themselves).

Additional search terms: *marker, remembrance, remember, vigil*

Advantages

- It is relatively low cost to meet with and draft policies with the local community, to remove the memorials, and to identify any new memorials as they are assembled.
 - Uniform policies ensure that all death memorials are treated in a consistent manner.
 - This measure considers the well-being of railroad employees as well as the local community, helping to minimize the negative effects on all involved.
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Drawbacks

- Family and loved ones may be reluctant to remove or relocate a memorial.
 - Allowing death memorials to be located on railroad property, even with guidance and policies in place to mitigate the effects, may still negatively impact some railroad employees, those who are or may become suicidal, and other vulnerable community members.
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Notable Practices

- Identify staff member(s) to receive training for communicating directly with the families of those who died on the rail system. It is advised that one railroad representative manage implementation of the policy to minimize the number of people interacting with family members and loved ones of the deceased [2].
 - Engage other community members who can provide mental health services or other social services that may be needed by family, friends, and the community.
 - Identify and leverage any existing local policies regarding public or roadside death memorials.
 - If a memorial is in an unsafe place, help family/friends find safer locations away from the rail system or online.
 - If possible, notify family/friends before the removal of memorials and clearly communicate the safety risks [2].
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References

[1] Suicide Prevention Resource Center, and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Education Development Center. (2018). [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools](#) (2nd ed.).

Document Excerpt: This toolkit reflects consensus recommendations developed in consultation with national experts, including school-based administrators and staff, clinicians, researchers, and crisis response professionals. It provides guidance and tools for postvention, a term used to describe activities that help people cope with the emotional distress resulting from a suicide and prevent additional trauma that could lead to further suicidal behavior and deaths, especially among people who are vulnerable.

This resource was developed primarily for administrators and staff in middle and high schools, but it can also be useful for parents and communities. Although some of the guidance can be used by schools serving other age groups, the developmental differences between students in elementary, middle, and high school, and college must be taken into account when using the toolkit to respond to a death in a school.

[2] RESTRAIL. (2014, September 10). [19.4 Removal of death memorials](#). Restrail Toolbox.

Description: Website describes removal of death memorials on railroad property.

Related Measures

- Collaboration with local government and communities
- Identify funding opportunities
- Incident cost estimation