

Motorists ignore warnings as level crossing trials con

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by Kate Higgins

kate.higgins@townsvillebulletin.com.au



A MOTORIST who raced a train along a dirt road before swerving into its path, and another who ducked around lowered boomgates, are just two of the 25 drivers who nearly lost their lives at North Queensland's level crossings over the past 12 months.

In the worst case, a driver not content to wait for a train

at a crossing at Kirknie Rd, Home Hill, raced along a dirt road parallel to the tracks and crossed into the train's path in August.

The car barely made it across the tracks, missing the train by less than a metre.

In October, a P-plater swerved around boomgates at an Allen St, South Townsville, crossing, avoiding a train by less than 10m.

Overall, there were 439 near-misses in Queensland this year, down 21 per cent from 556 in 2009.

This included 225 incidents with pedestrians, 199 with motor vehicles, 14 with cyclists and one with plant equipment.

Queensland Rail acting CEO Jim Benstead urged Northern motorists to stay safe this Christmas and cautioned that a train moving at 60 or 80km/h could take kilometres to stop.

"The drivers can't swerve or avoid motorists, so if there's a collision, the car, truck or pedestrian will come off second best," he said.

He said Queensland Rail had taken steps to reduce level crossing incidents, including installing CCTV cameras at sites at Cluden, Brandon and Bowen between 2009 and 2010 to deter dangerous driving behaviour.

Queensland Rail chief network officer John Pistak said a "valet" warning system with in-road lights, similar to an airport runway, was being trialled at a crossing at Bemerside, near Ingham.

He said results of the trial, which started in September, were being reviewed and no

decision on whether to roll out the technology had been made. "This technology is a cheaper alternative to constructing boom gates or overpass," he said.

Last month, the *Townsville Bulletin* reported a warning system, developed in Kwan, would be trialled across the North.

The Pixie radio broadcast system broadcasts alerts about approaching trains a vehicle's radio, regardless of whether it is turned on and will be added to 108 crossings and 350 vehicles.

New frontier for city hospital's gynaecologist

TOWNSVILLE Hospital is to benefit from the knowledge of gynaecologist Dr Kurinji Kannan, one of only seven urogynaecologists in Queensland.

Dr Kannan has passed her sub-specialist exam after graduating with her medical degree from Madurai Kamaraj University in the Indian province of Tamil Nadu in 1993.

The mother of two was delighted with the achievement, despite it being a "long and sometimes bumpy road", and said the ability to change a woman's life was very rewarding.

"It has been years and years of study and I can't express how delighted I am to be a qualified sub-specialist and in a position to help so many women in our community," she said.

"It's not a field where we see too many life-threatening cases, but the impact that urogynaecology can have on a woman's quality of life is profound."

Townsville Hospital director of obstetrics and gynaecology Dr Louis McPherson said the field of urogynaecology was highly specialised.

"Our urogynaecology department was founded by Professor Ajay Rane back in 2000," he said.

"In those years many women with uterine and genital prolapse and soul-destroying incontinence have had their lives turned around."

Dr Kannan arrived in Townsville in 2006 after stints as a gynaecologist in New Zealand and Perth.

"Passing these very difficult and competitive exams is a considerable achievement," Dr McPherson said.



SPECIALIST ACHIEVEMENT: Dr Kurinji Kannan, now qualified as one of only seven urogynaecologists in Queensland