Railroads that carry people and freight through the Chicago area have a hidden problem: They have a history of ignoring signal inspection requirements, overworking their crews and punishing those who speak up about safety concerns.

In this book, “Railroad Collisions: A Deadly Story of Mismanaged Risk,” author George Swimmer uses well-researched facts to open the readers’ eyes to a terrible reality: Only a small percentage of railroad crossing accidents, derailments and trespasser deaths are acted upon or even made public. When such incidents are covered in the news, the blame is assigned to the train’s operator, motorists, or pedestrians. But in fact, the blame ultimately falls on the railroad management.

Mr. Swimmer’s unique perspective is based in his experience as a concerned citizen. He is not an employee or executive in the transportation industry. Those in his community who were injured or killed in easily preventable incidents touched him.

From the first paragraph of the book through the last, he carefully takes the reader from incident to incident. It paints a vast portrait of an industry that has a long way to go before it can genuinely claim to embrace a "safety culture". Whether it was crossing gate relays that are defective, to "false positive" clear signals or "hot spots" where trespassers are frequently mowed over by trains, Mr. Swimmer's book highlights that most rail transportation companies are focused on the wrong side of safety. That is, they focus more on the management of death and destruction instead of comprehensive safety initiatives.

The United States government is not spared from Mr. Swimmer's analysis: A big player in mismanaged risk is the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). At times, the agency has outright ignored or silenced pleas from train crews and whistleblowers who end up either dying or being involved in a fatality due to the death-risk management culture.

Throughout the book, Mr. Swimmer quotes industry experts, experienced railroad train crews and numerous recommendations by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to back up his claims. None of this should surprise anyone who has worked at least a few weeks on the ground in rail transportation operations.

There is a thread of hope throughout the book in the few - but not insignificant - improvements in rail safety over the past 30 years. Some of these changes were initiated based on Mr. Swimmer's advocacy, as well as many others in Illinois, such as the DuPage Railroad Safety Council.

For anyone working for passenger, freight or rapid transit railroads, this book is a must-read. Personally, if I could afford it, I would give a copy to every rail manager and politician I meet. Not only does it expose and share solutions for the major hazards that exist, but it vindicates most - if not all - operating crews who are blamed for accidents. Don't wait on reading this book. Your life - and that of others - depends on it!

George Swimmer's book is available through Amazon. ISBN 9781517106331