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CIRAS is a completely impartial system that provides a way for rail industry staff to report safety concerns in confidence.

However, concerns about safety should be raised through company channels first. If you feel this is not possible then contact CIRAS.

5 facts about CIRAS

- CIRAS is available to anyone who works within the railway industry, across all sectors.
- CIRAS is operated by a small, friendly team of eight staff working from an office in central London.
- In its 13 years of operation, CIRAS has never breached confidentiality.
- Last year CIRAS received an average of six reports a week.
- More than 55,000 copies of *The Reporter* are distributed each issue.

Linking all sectors of the industry

There are many reporting systems in the rail industry, most run in-house by the rail companies themselves. So what makes CIRAS, which is a small, independent organisation, so unique?

Firstly, the CIRAS service offers its reporters complete confidentiality. Whilst it always encourages reporters to consider using company channels first, CIRAS understands that this isn't always a comfortable prospect. Feedback from CIRAS reporters shows that many fear recrimination from managers. Therefore, on receiving a report the CIRAS research team work with the reporter to ensure the removal of all identifiable information, whilst maintaining enough detail to help the company concerned process the query.

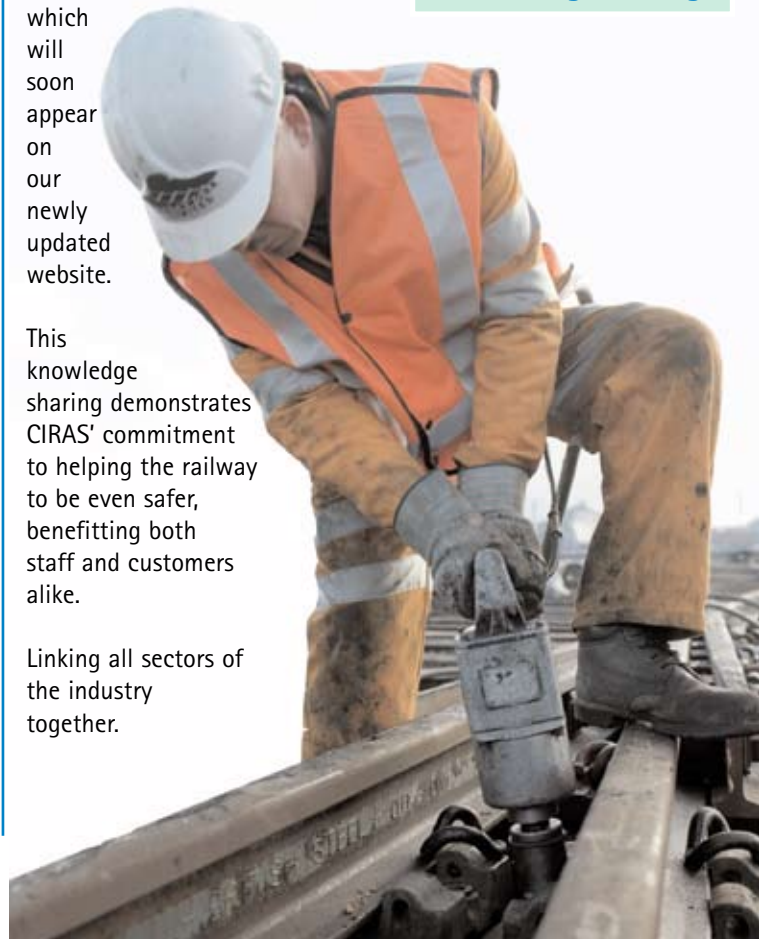
Another CIRAS benefit is that the organisation is completely impartial. CIRAS works with, rather than for, the railway companies on behalf of the reporter, to help reach a successful resolution. CIRAS doesn't judge the reporter or the company, it simply facilitates a resolution that all parties are happy with. The companies concerned can be from any part of the railway industry – the CIRAS service is not specifically available for one sector or

another, but covers freight, train operating companies and infrastructure to name a few. If you haven't seen your part of the industry featured in the reporter, it doesn't mean that CIRAS won't accept your reports. We welcome a wide variety of reports, many of which will soon appear on our newly updated website.

This knowledge sharing demonstrates CIRAS' commitment to helping the railway to be even safer, benefitting both staff and customers alike.

Linking all sectors of the industry together.

- Confidential
- Impartial
- Across all sectors
- Knowledge sharing



IN SHORT

With help from your reports to CIRAS:

- Atkins Rail have developed a QSE staff intranet site which will list and track all close call reports. All staff will have access to this site, will be able to review the status of each report and make further enquiries if interested; and



Intranet access for all staff

- Network Rail have extended the hours covered by duty operations managers in Scotland East reducing the number of times staff are required to be contacted, or to attend incidents, when they are on-call.

CIRAS NEWS

- The CIRAS stand at Railtex 2009 was a roaring success! It was great to meet so many of you, and to hear such positive feedback about the service CIRAS offers the industry.
- If you would like a member of the CIRAS team to speak at your safety forum please contact clare.alder@ciras.org.uk. We would love the opportunity to come and brief your staff on the benefits of CIRAS.
- Why not check out the new look CIRAS website at www.ciras.org.uk.

EDITORIAL

Editor: Clare Alder
email: clare.alder@ciras.org.uk
tel: 0207 580 0236

General Enquiries: enquiries@ciras.org.uk
Please note that CIRAS cannot accept reports at this email address.

Hazardous icy platforms

A reporter is concerned that platforms in the Leeds Northwest area were not cleared sufficiently of ice and snow during the latest cold spell. This applies to all platforms in the area, but the reporter mentions Saltaire, Crossflats, Keighley and Shipley as being particularly bad as well as the relatively new timber platforms.

The poor treatment of platforms meant there was a lot of black ice and slush on platforms, creating a slip and fall hazard according to the reporter. York control repeatedly had to ask train staff to warn passengers of icy conditions. On some

platforms, only two coach-lengths of the platforms were treated, even though they were used by trains with four coaches.

The reporter would like to see more pre-emptive action when cold weather is forecast and for platforms to be continually re-treated thoroughly as long as necessary. The reporter further comments that the situation this year has been significantly worse than previous years. Can Northern take steps to ensure that platforms in the Leeds Northwest area will be treated sufficiently the next time snow and ice becomes an issue?

Fare evaders pose threat to staff

A reporter would like to highlight the vulnerability of train crew that face passengers who have evaded paying fares at Reading, Maidenhead and Slough. Fare evaders pass through barriers which appear to be being opened earlier in the evenings than they were before; in the recent past, barriers have been manned until much later – until 11pm or 12pm. At some locations, barriers have been opened 7.30pm on Friday and Saturday evenings in the last few weeks. The reporter suggests short staffing is the main cause.



Gatelines are being opened earlier

Consequently, train crew have been subjected to threatening behaviour. The reporter has witnessed dozens of potentially confrontational youths lining up waiting for the barriers to open at these stations and, once opened, flood into the station. Revenue Protection Investigation (RPI) staff used to work much later, but now they often finish by 9pm. This is forcing train guards and managers to check tickets. The reporter says manning the barriers until later in the evening would not only protect staff against the threat of verbal and physical abuse, but also against lost revenue. Perhaps the revenue saved by having manned barriers in the evenings would outweigh the cost saved by having fewer station staff, as well as protecting against physical and verbal abuse.

The full version of this report and response is available on the [CIRAS website](http://www.ciras.org.uk).

Response from First Great Western

The company does not want to put any of its employees at risk of assault, including on board crew, the Revenue Protection team or Gateline colleagues. A number of steps have been taken to reduce the risk of assault to 1st line colleagues which includes a substantial investment in Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) based in the Thames Valley and Avon areas, complimenting the existing PCSOs in the London Suburban area. The number of BT Police Officers operating within the Western sector of London North has also recently been increased. The company operates a number of Personal Security Groups made up of 1st line colleagues and line managers, run under the stewardship of the Head of Security. The company operates gatelines during the hours that it is economically viable to do so, having considered the revenue, customer service, and security matters. The company is in the process of reviewing the operational hours of the gatelines and the reporter's comments will be included within this review.

"the company is in the process of reviewing the operational hours"

Response from Northern Rail:

Unfortunately Northern Rail experienced a number of problems with our winter precautions during the recent cold spell, which created a number of hazardous station platforms and unfortunately led to a handful of customer and staff accidents occurring.

Most importantly it was discovered that the de-icing product used, Magic Ice Melt, was not effective in preventing the build up of ice and snow. In addition there was some confusion about whether our maintenance contractor or local station staff should

treat staffed stations, and some confusion about the trigger arrangements for our contractor. As an immediate action we instigated cessation of use of Magic Ice Melt and commenced use of rock salt for both preventative and reactive de-icing. There was also an investigation conducted which identified a number of recommendations to improve our winterisation arrangements and a small working party has been formed to enact these recommendations.

In essence our maintenance contractor is contracted to grit all stations with 48 hours of being notified of the need to commence



Platforms were full of slush and black ice

winterisation arrangements. Local staff will additionally grit staffed stations. Gritting will be continued at a 48 hour frequency during a sustained cold spell. Northern Operational Control will be responsible for activating winterisation arrangements based on the weather forecasts obtained from Network Rail. We thus hope to be better prepared for the next cold spell of the winter.

'Inadequate assessments' in maintenance depots

A reporter is concerned that assessments in Northern Rail train maintenance depots, Newton Heath, Neville Hill and Heaton, are not being carried out properly, or, in some cases, not at all. The reporter states that staff are often asked, or

even pressurised, to sign assessment forms without being assessed. This includes assessments on jacks, cranes and axel bearings. When assessment on axel bearings is done, it tends to be minimal. When staff are doing safety critical assessments, which are meant to prove their competence on trains, they are often not asked to sign the assessment form at all. The reporter believes these practices have been going on for about a year.

The reporter believes this is happening because the audit system is inadequate, as assessments which have been done are not checked. Axels and trains might not be maintained properly and jacks could be operated incorrectly as a result of staff not being assessed and given corrective feedback.



Are staff being pressurised to sign forms?

Response from Northern Rail:

This report is extremely concerning and one that Northern takes very seriously. Robust assessment of competence of safety critical staff is a critical control measure and assessment processes are designed to provide a number of safeguards, including verification of assessments, to try and prevent the process being abused. In addition Northern undertakes comprehensive internal audits of the safety management system to determine levels of compliance, and any deficiencies are tracked until issues identified are closed

out. However, it is always possible for the best constructed processes to be deliberately circumvented, and the reporter is thanked for bringing this practice to our attention. A detailed audit of the engineering competence management system has been commissioned to examine the assessment process and assessment records, to attempt to determine whether the process is working effectively, and whether it is being abused at all.

If deliberate attempts to falsify records are identified, this may lead to a disciplinary

The reporter suggests that Northern Rail:

- take steps to ensure that assessments in these maintenance depots are always carried out in full and signed for; and
- reviews the auditing process for assessments.

Additional Information: The reporter is aware of this happening at one depot, which cannot be identified for reasons of confidentiality, but suspects it could be happening at all three depots.

"staff are often asked... to sign assessment forms without being assessed"

investigation. However the main aim of this audit is to identify weaknesses in the competence assessment process and documentation, to seek opportunities to improve.

We will be examining whether the process of counter-signing and verification of assessments can be improved, and will consider the benefits of introducing some assessments by independent managers.

'Poor safety culture' at Shenfield depot

A reporter is concerned about a number of safety risks frequently occurring on sites managed by Shenfield depot.

These include:

- T2s not being taken when they should; and
- lookouts used unsafely instead of taking T2s.

Module T7 section 9.7 (b) of the Rule Book, 'Using lookouts in a tunnel or during darkness or poor visibility', states that: "You must only rely on lookouts to give the warning in or near a tunnel or during darkness or poor visibility if:

- a pee wee system is in use;
- the speed of approaching trains is restricted to 20 mph, the lookouts have been properly positioned and distant lookouts are not needed to get the required sighting distance, (an emergency or temporary speed restriction must be imposed, if necessary); or
- the work is within a work site in a possession and you have made the arrangements as shown in section ten of this module. In all other circumstances, during darkness, poor visibility or if the site of work is in or near a tunnel, you must not rely on lookouts to give the warning."

At Shenfield depot, lookouts are often used at night as the only means of protection where trains will run at more than the permitted 20mph, in some cases up to 90mph. The reporter believes this is done instead of taking proper T2s to save time. The reporter is especially concerned that workers new to the job (known as blue-hats, as they wear blue hats instead of white), are particularly at risk of accidents and that they will pick up bad safety



The appropriate use of lookouts

According to the reporter rule-breaking has become the norm at Shenfield depot and is overlooked by management.

"as a result of this report a number of actions will be taken"

Would Network Rail consider investigating the apparent rule-breaking at Shenfield depot, in particular the alleged practice of using lookouts at night instead of taking T2s? Further information: The reporter stresses that if inspections were to take place, they would have to be unannounced to have any effect.

Response from Network Rail:

With the recent changes to the Network Rail Maintenance Organisation the new management team has been examining the safety culture within Romford Maintenance Delivery unit. This has resulted in re-briefing of key safety processes such as COSS briefing and the introduction of unannounced safety tours. The suggestion that there are significant failures in a key safety process is surprising. However, as a result of this report a number of actions will be taken:

- 1) staff will be re-briefed on the rules surrounding the use of lookouts in darkness;
- 2) planners will be reminded of the checks they need to perform when producing SSOW packs for hours of darkness;
- 3) new entrants will be asked to feed back on their experience;
- 4) specific briefing will be provided on the consequence of setting the wrong examples to new staff;
- 5) an investigation will be conducted at Shenfield depot which will include review of the Rimini packs for the last six weeks night work to see if a lookout was appointed; and
- 6) the unannounced safety tours which have been introduced will be scheduled to cover evening or night work.

Fatigue due to on call duties

Mobile Operations Managers (MOMs) in Scotland East are working excessive hours as a result of the on call duties they are undertaking on top of their normal working hours according to one reporter. Concern has also been expressed that the second line of on call in the Scotland East area could be someone who is based up to 110- 150 miles away and therefore not immediately available to cover if needed. This is said to be resulting in the MOMs receiving inadequate rest between shifts when on call and suffering from fatigue, which in turn affects their concentration levels and could result in a mistake being made.

MOMs in Scotland East currently work on call duties every other week, and the reporter states that whilst they are on call they can be called out at any time to attend to a failure on the infrastructure. The reporter is aware that this has resulted in several staff working up to 16 hours, whilst only receiving 8 hours or less rest before returning to work the next day.

The reporter feels that this is unacceptable and not in line with the European Working Time Directive. The inability of the second line on call to alleviate the workload due to their remote locations is seen by the reporter to be a major concern, as it does not provide the fall back procedure it is supposed to. The current time of year also increases the chance of the on call staff being called out to attend problems due to leaf fall and low adhesion. Could Network Rail look at the possibility of creating an extra night shift, where all the MOMs would rotate through the day and night shifts, effectively eliminating the on call duties?



Mobile Operations Manager on call

Response from Network Rail:

We thank the reporter for raising this matter. It is always a concern for Network Rail not to put an undue workload onto staff. With a view to that, consideration is being given to revise the Mobile Operations Manager (MOM) coverage in Scotland East. This action will not put a permanent nightshift in place, as operational requirements do not justify this. However, it will extend the hours of the day covered by duty MOM's in Scotland East within their normal working week.

These arrangements should, on average, lessen the on-call requirements for the Eastern Area MOM's. Commensurately there should also be a reduction in the number of times staff are required to be contacted, or required to attend incidents when they are on-call. The final shape of the arrangements will be the result of correct HR processes applying to changes to rostered hours being followed.

'Unsafe work practices' on worksite at Sandhills station

A reporter has contacted CIRAS to express concern about several practices on the worksite at Sandhills station that he or she has witnessed and deems to be unsafe.

- Staff are working on two aluminium scaffolding towers which are over 1.8 meters in height without handrails or stabilizers
- The aluminium scaffolding towers are within 1.25 meters of the running line, as the work is taking place on an island platform during the day with trains travelling past on both sides
- There appears to be no COSS or site warden present whilst this work is taking place
- The worksite is not cordoned off, passengers/members of the public can walk directly past the base of the scaffolding towers

The reporter is concerned that a member of staff could fall from the scaffolding towers with potentially fatal consequences, seeing as they are

"a member of staff could fall ... with potentially fatal consequences"

working in close proximity to the live third rail. Concern has also been expressed that a member of the public could trip on the equipment whilst rushing for a train and could injure themselves.

Sandhills is a busy interchange station with numerous passengers travelling through the station, especially at peak times of the day.

- Would the company responsible for carrying out the work look at the possibility of re-assessing the worksite at this location, to make sure that the work is being conducted in the safest possible manner?
- The reporter would like the scaffolding towers to have handrails and stabilizers in order for the staff to work safely on the equipment in such close proximity to the running rail, or for the work to be conducted when the third rail is not live.



A scaffolding tower

Response from J Murphy and Sons

Firstly we would like to thank the reporter for raising his or her concerns over this matter, we agree that the reporter had a valid concern over the use of stabilisers on portable access platforms at the time of their report. In the time between the report being made to CIRAS and our receiving it, the North West Regional HSQE Manager had visited the site in question and seen that stabilisers were not being used. He stopped the work until a safe system was put in place.

A meeting was then held between Murphy Site Management, our HSQE Manager and the Network Rail Site Manager to decide on a safe system that could be put in place. Due to the location of the works, on an island platform that is open to the public, it was agreed that the use of stabilisation legs would increase the area taken up by the platform and be more of a hazard to the passengers, it was therefore decided that the towers would be tied into the exposed steelwork of the new platform canopy and access towers would only to be moved when there no trains were passing.

It was also decided that the towers should not be erected during times of heavy passenger usage, therefore the times that towers would be used on the platform was restricted to between 09.30 hrs and 16.00 hrs and the platforms would be removed when not in use.

All access platforms are erected by trained operatives and are checked daily by the Network Rail site manager to ensure that these measures are being carried out. The works being carried out during the day are all over 1.25 meters from the platform edge and as such are not on or near the line and therefore do not require a COSS to be appointed. While there was no requirements for us to provide a COSS the company wished to add an extra level of control into the worksite due to the proximity of the open lines so the use of site keepers was introduced to ensure that no operatives strayed within 1.25 meters from the platform edge.

One site keeper was to be on duty at all times while undertaking works and for the most part two site keepers would be working, this was the case for the full period of the works. This safe system of work was briefed to all employees and contractors on site though task briefings. The company has had site keeper armbands made to identify the site keepers on the worksite. The platform was open to the public while the works were carried out and this was an obligation of the contract the majority of the work was carried out with the station closed to the public but there was only a limited time that we were able to keep the station closed as Sandhills is a busy interchange station. In summary while we agree that there was a problem with the use of portable access platforms, I hope that I have explained why the other concerns of the reporter were not a safety issue.

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