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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, where possible.

**"the information CIRAS captures can really benefit companies by sharing lessons learned"**

# Working together

Like many organisations CIRAS is coming to the end of a financial year. It is time for us to take stock, review progress and consider the value and benefits that we provide to the industry and to look to the future. Here at CIRAS we continually seek to improve on the essential service we offer - a completely impartial, confidential system that provides a way for rail industry staff to report safety concerns in absolute confidence.

Each year more than 600 railway people choose to contact CIRAS seeking guidance, advice and support. As in previous years, our highly trained staff have helped each person navigate through some exceptionally difficult issues and identify the best possible way forward. CIRAS doesn't just help the individual, the information CIRAS captures can really benefit companies by sharing the lessons learned from the confidential reports and their responses.

Of the reports received last year 42 per cent resulted in additional safety measures being put into place. One report this year even prompted an amendment to the *Rule Book*. Thirty per cent of the reports contained information companies were previously unaware of.

**"42 per cent of all the reports resulted in additional safety measures"**

A key question, of course, is which issue would have prevented the major accident? We will never know. However, it is well known that major accidents often occur because a series of small, discreet faults or incidents all come together at the same time. CIRAS will continue to listen to each and every reporter's safety concern, and strive to facilitate the resolution of each issue to everyone's satisfaction. Our aim this year is to continue to contribute to the industry by providing a safe and reliable system that we can all be proud of.

## Some success stories 2009



- Train drivers spotted a loophole in rules associated with emergency speed restrictions. The *Rule Book* and Railway Group Standard were then changed.
- Worksite safety concerns arose about a subcontractor. A meeting was called and actions implemented.
- Staff felt pressurised to sign assessment forms without being assessed at a maintenance depot. A detailed audit was commissioned and improvements made.
- Tube trains were reported with dim headlights. LUL investigated and replacement components were ordered.
- Portacabins were used for accommodation on a work site. The arrangements were removed and alternative arrangements were made.
- Clarification was requested for what procedures to follow when assaulted. Guidance was issued on measures in place to help.
- A lack of sun blinds in cabs were reported. New blinds were ordered.
- A site survey to establish contractors' understanding of English was carried out. Continuous monitoring was introduced.
- There was extensive vegetation growth at Workington station. Preventative maintenance was arranged.



## IN SHORT

With help from your reports to CIRAS:

- a successful pilot scheme reviewing systems for safe control movements, depot protection systems and management of interfaces was carried out by First Great Western and is now due to be rolled out to other engineering depots; and
- London Underground and DLR worked together to remove pigeon faeces which was causing problems at Canning Town station.

## CIRAS NEWS

- Seven new CIRAS reps attended a welcome meeting at the CIRAS offices in London on 11 February. As well as learning about their new role, delegates were given a full explanation of all the security measures in place at CIRAS to ensure confidentiality to all reporters.



- CIRAS exhibited at RMT's annual safety conference on 24 February. Delegates attended from across different sectors.
- Meet the CIRAS team at this year's Infrarail exhibition at Birmingham, 13–15 April, on stand 1080. We will be available to answer your questions about CIRAS.

## EDITORIAL

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Please note that CIRAS cannot accept reports at this email address.
- Electronic Newsletter: if you would like to receive an electronic copy of *The Reporter*, email us at [newsletterrequests@ciras.org.uk](mailto:newsletterrequests@ciras.org.uk).
- The full version of all reports and responses contained in *The Reporter* are available on the CIRAS website [www.ciras.org.uk](http://www.ciras.org.uk).

## Defective warning horns in snowy weather

Following a report that was previously made to CIRAS, an additional concern has been raised regarding warning horns on class 158 and 170 trains in Scotland. The concern relates to the horns becoming defective during



Could the warning horn be repositioned?

snowy conditions. The reporter has highlighted that these horns become congested with snow during flurries, preventing staff from sounding them when needed. This is believed to be as a result of the sleeve used to cover the horns becoming ineffective when trains drive into flurries and also, possibly, because of their poor positioning. The concern is that it only takes a small amount of snow to make the warning horn defective.

**"it only takes a small amount of snow to make the warning horn defective"**

The rules in TW 5 require a driver to tell the signaller if the warning horn is completely defective. When authorised, the driver must proceed at 20 mph to where the instructions of the train operator's contingency plan can be followed. This could be a journey of many miles. The train can continue normally if one tone is still operative, but the driver must inform his company control of the defect.

The reporter believes that a defective horn could lead to difficulties warning track workers of an approaching train. It was suggested that as a short-term measure, a heavier sleeve be used to cover the warning horn. Longer-term, it was asked if the warning horn could be repositioned, to prevent it becoming blocked with snow. Could First ScotRail look into this issue and take these suggestions on board?

### Response from First ScotRail:

Initially, First ScotRail investigated this particular problem which was mitigated by fitting a sleeve over the horn to prevent snow ingress. Engineers reviewed options considering whether the horn could be re-located but this would involve intrusive modifications. The option favoured was to fit trace heating, which involves a low voltage supply to the horn box, which could be retrofitted to existing train horns. Subsequently they have undertaken a review of horn failures due to freezing weather.

**"engineers reviewed options considering whether the horn could be relocated"**

In the event of a partial or complete horn failure safety is not compromised – the criteria for continuing to operate a train in

service is given in the *Rule Book* and SOM303 provides adequate mitigation for continuing to work in service with a defective horn. The number of instances, consequential delays and cancellations were reviewed and it was determined that the level of incidents that would be saved would not justify the costs for modifying the units.

The existing sock arrangement is considered adequate as it does provide protection from the elements and driving snow while not diminishing the sound level of the horns. Based on the cost benefits analysis and the safety mitigation that is in place as per the *Rule Book* and SOM303 it has been recommended that a fleet campaign change is not undertaken at this time.

Instead, this modification should be applied during the future overhaul of the horns undertaken at C6.



One COSS has been supervising two platforms

## Concerns about subcontractor practices

A reporter has expressed concern regarding various safety issues across Southeastern's stations.

The primary concern is that one COSS has been appointed to supervise work sites on two separately located platforms. The reporter goes on to list other examples of unsafe working practices being carried out:

- Workers taking scaffolding down from under a footbridge with no protection. Should a T3 have been taken here?
- A method statement affirming that the COSS should keep everybody on the inner side of the yellow line, away from the platform edge - however scaffolding towers are being put up on the other side of the line close to the platform edge.
- The COSS is being asked to undertake other duties, leaving workers unsupervised on scaffolding towers.

The reporter believes that independent monitoring and unannounced checks of these station refurbishment projects are no longer being undertaken by someone impartial. There is a concern that a lack of independent auditing at such sites could increase the likelihood of lapses in safety, which could generate the potential for incidents or accidents.

For the subcontractor:

Would the company look at the possibility of re-assessing the worksites across the south east, to ensure that there is a COSS for each work group, that method statements are being adhered to, and that the work is being conducted in the safest possible manner?

For Southeastern:

The reporter suggests cross-checking the subcontractor's method statements together with unannounced site visits to ensure proper procedure is being followed.

### Response from Southeastern:

Southeastern would like to thank the reporter for raising these concerns. Southeastern decided to use this information positively and called for a meeting between the facility manager, contract manager and a senior manager from within the subcontractor company.

**"Southeastern decided to use this information positively and called for a meeting"**

The primary purpose of this meeting was to discuss the planning and monitoring of contractor work.

As a result a range of recommendations and actions were agreed to address the concerns raised by the reporter. They included:

- all work shall be carried out as per the approved method statement by competent persons;
- a robust programme of monitoring by the contract manager is implemented;
- Southeastern will implement a schedule of monitoring of works; and
- all findings to be included for discussion in the joint monthly performance review meetings.

Southeastern consider that these recommendations will ensure that all contractors work in accordance with the safe systems of work agreed and do not introduce any level of risk.

## State of car park at Bolton station

CIRAS was contacted by a reporter concerned by the general state of the car park at Bolton station. A pile of tyres appear to have been dumped and could attract more fly-tipping, potentially posing a fire hazard in close proximity to the running line. There is also loose wood lying around.

Also this fly tipping could attract anti-social behaviour. It is suggested that the problem could be nipped in the bud and the car park be subjected to a good tidy up.



For more TOC reports and responses please visit our website [www.ciras.org.uk](http://www.ciras.org.uk)

### Response from Northern Rail:

When the report was received, the tyres and wood which had been fly tipped in the car park had already been reported to our facilities maintenance contractor to arrange removal.

Unfortunately they did not originally give any priority to this. This has now been rectified and the offending items were cleared as a matter of priority.

## Concerns about temporary speed restriction boards

A reporter has contacted CIRAS with three concerns about the condition and positioning of temporary speed restriction (TSR) boards throughout the Ipswich and Felixstowe areas.

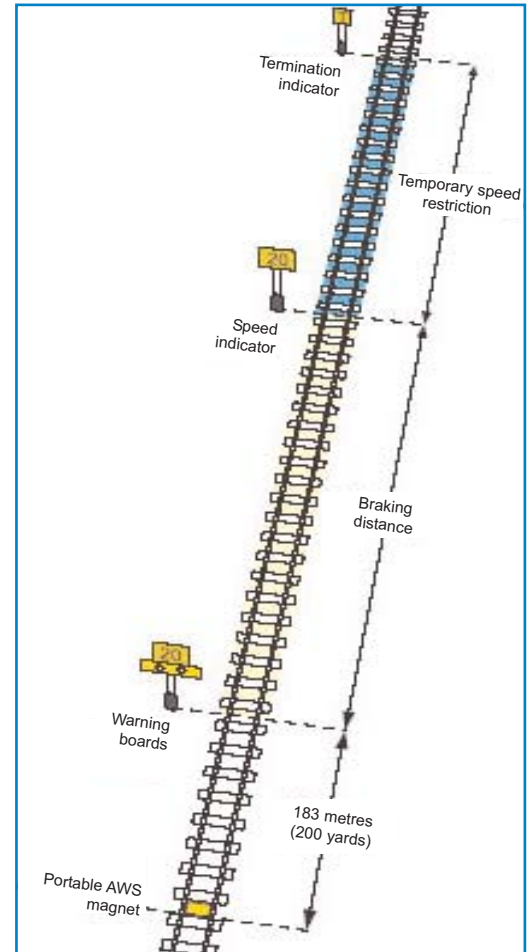
The first concern is that the TSR boards are always dirty and many are no longer reflective making them difficult, if not impossible, to see at night. This poses an obvious hazard that a driver could unknowingly travel through a speed restriction at an inappropriate speed. The reporter adds that simply cleaning the boards does not work as they are covered in a number of years' worth of dirt and oil. Could Network Rail consider replacing the TSR boards in this area and ensure they are clean and visible in all conditions?

**"a driver could unknowingly travel through a speed restriction at an inappropriate speed"**

The second concern is that the reporter finds the positioning of these boards unusual. TSR boards are meant to be securely fixed in the ballast next to the track. However, the reporter has seen them fixed to posts of overhead line equipment (OLE) or placed in buckets filled with ballast.

This presents two problems: the first being that sometimes the OLE posts are on a curve and so the board is placed out of the driver's direct line of sight; and the second is that the boards are not secure when placed in the buckets and can easily fall over. In both instances the driver may not see the board and apply sharp, sudden braking when realising they are in a speed restriction. Could Network Rail re-brief staff on the correct positioning of these boards?

The third concern is about the use of limited clearance speed restriction boards in place of normal speed restriction boards. The reporter comments that it is common in the Ipswich and Felixstowe areas for limited clearance boards to be used as the standard when there is, in fact, no limited clearance. The reporter finds this confusing and does not understand the practice. Could Network Rail re-brief staff as to the correct use of different kinds of speed restriction boards?



*Temporary speed restriction basic arrangements*



*All the remaining boards have been cleaned and checked*

### Response from Network Rail:

Network Rail would like to thank the reporter for raising the above concern regarding the use of speed restriction boards. Safety is a highly important issue for Network Rail.

All the speed boards at the Ipswich depot have been checked and a number of boards were found to be damaged or dirty and these have been taken out of service. All the remaining boards have been cleaned and checked again so that they are fully reflective.

The arrangements for board positioning have been reviewed and were found to be dictated by the equipment that was available in the stores.

The continued use of ballast buckets for mounting boards has been stopped and

replaced by rail-foot-clamped speed board brackets. These come in two lengths, a short one for limited clearance use and a standard length version.

Staff have been briefed on when each type should be used. An information poster has also been placed within the board storage area as a permanent reminder to staff.

**"staff have been briefed on when each type should be used"**

Finally, staff have also been reminded that the correct erecting equipment should be used at all times.

For more infrastructure reports and responses please visit our website  
[www.ciras.org.uk](http://www.ciras.org.uk)

## Agency staff fear raising safety concerns

An experienced COSS who works for an agency fears raising safety concerns because their client might replace them if they do.

The COSS is concerned that business pressure often overrides the need to carry out work safely. Examples where COSS agency staff have been quickly replaced or simply not invited back to work include:

- requesting someone to stop working when leaning over unsafely from the top of a ladder;
- querying site paperwork with no track diagrams;
- questioning the lack of pre-possession meetings; and
- expecting a COSS to leave a site unattended for a while.

The reporter is concerned that despite the promotion of a 'no blame' safety culture, experienced agency staff committed to following the correct rules and procedures can find themselves in a dilemma. A client contractor can effectively remove a member of agency staff at his discretion, a reality that may frequently inhibit

the reporting of genuine safety concerns. And there is little or no protection for safety-minded individuals when raising a concern elicits a negative reaction simply because it comes from a member of agency staff.

The COSS suggests that this is a common problem and asks that Network Rail consider the implications where client contractors work with agencies. Stopping work on safety grounds is far more difficult for a member of agency staff to do.

The COSS asks:

- what should agency staff do if they have a real-time safety concern to raise about work being carried out on a client contractor's site, and are unable to speak directly to the client about it; and
- in the best interests of safety, can any reassurance be given that raising such a concern won't affect future employment prospects?



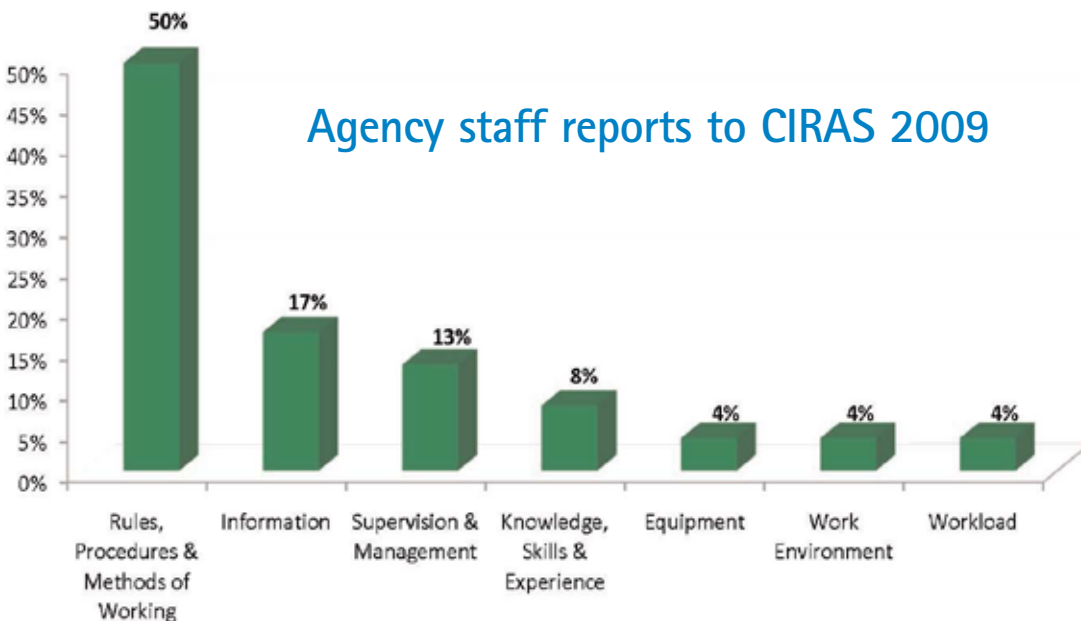
### Response from Network Rail:

Thank you to the reporter for raising these concerns. Anyone with a genuine safety concern, who is unwilling to raise it with their employer or site manager, should use CIRAS. Any immediate issues which affect the 'safety of the line' should be progressed through the signaller and route control.

**"Anyone with a genuine safety concern, who is unwilling to raise it with their employer or site manager, should use CIRAS"**

Assurances about future employment is difficult for Network Rail to respond to as it isn't the direct employer in such circumstances. Network Rail encourages all contract staff to adopt an open and honest reporting policy. If the reporter knows of any specific instance where a member of staff has been disciplined or prevented from working for raising safety concerns, or if a member of staff has been told to ignore any unsafe practices, then Network Rail would certainly investigate it thoroughly.

### Agency staff reports to CIRAS 2009



During 2009, five per cent of the total number of processed reports came from agency staff. Of these reports:

- 79 per cent were from agency staff working on Network Rail infrastructure; and
- 21 per cent of reports were from agency staff working on London Underground infrastructure.

The issues reported can be categorised according to Network Rail's key incident factors as illustrated in this chart.

## Untrained staff handling safety critical calls



Canary Wharf underground station

A reporter is concerned about untrained staff handling safety critical calls at the control centre based at Canary Wharf.

In addition, a high workload in a highly pressured environment with fewer staff is causing stress and low morale amongst staff.

The control centre handles calls about infrastructure-related problems on London Underground's Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines. Such problems include: lift and escalator faults; water and electrical problems; platform and depot issues; signal failures; and track faults. Staff are required to achieve a 97 per cent call pickup rate – with every call answered within 60 seconds – otherwise Tube Lines incur penalties.

**"staff are required to achieve a 97 per cent call pickup rate"**

To achieve this high standard, the reporter states a full complement of trained staff is required. Although there are supposed to be a minimum of four staff rostered on during day and night shifts, there have been occasions recently when only three staff

members are working which, during meal breaks, is reduced to two people operating the phones. If staff are absent due to sickness or annual leave, staff from other teams in the centre are asked to cover the roles to ensure the calls are answered promptly. But these staff are not trained as control centre operators and only take messages for the operatives to call back, which the reporter fears could lead to a safety critical issue being misinterpreted or errors being made.

Could Tube Lines consider training other staff and comment on how the rostering situation could be improved to ensure safety critical calls are covered by trained staff?

### Response from Tube Lines:

A recruitment campaign is underway with adverts for control centre staff at every level including a new control centre manager. Additional overtime has been authorised to keep levels above a minimum and no untrained staff are currently taking fault calls.

## Alarm for earth defects repeatedly cancelled

A reporter is concerned that, for some time, the traction earth detection equipment has been picking up traction earth defects when trains enter and exit on section 10 at Northfields and Ealing Common depots and section 44 at Cockfosters depot.

The correct procedure when a genuine earth defect is identified is for staff to cancel the alarm in the control room, refer to the traction earth detection diagrams and then contact Leicester Square substation control room. However, defects are being picked up as much as 15 times a day. This is leading to staff cancelling the alarm and referring to the diagram to check that a train is in the section because it is felt that the earth defect is not genuine.

**"defects are being picked up as much as 15 times a day"**

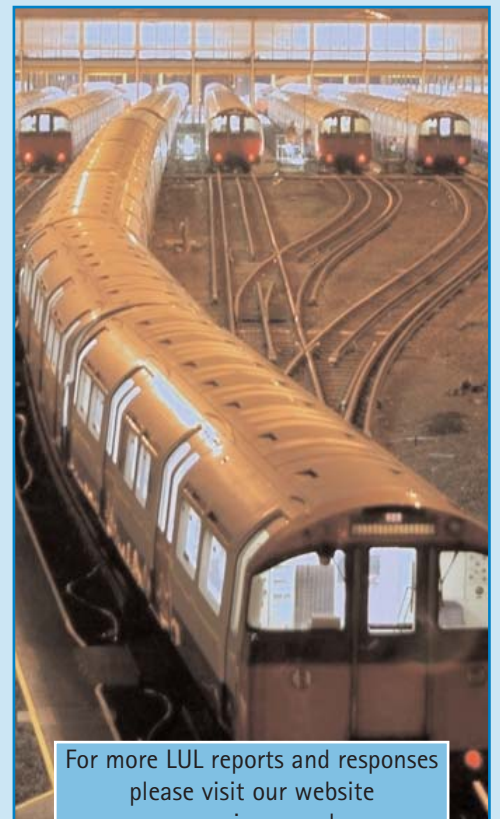
This is raising concerns that if the traction earth detection equipment at these locations is not fixed it could lead to staff becoming complacent and cancelling the alarm when there is, in fact, a genuine earth defect that needs to be addressed. The reporter feels that this is compromising the seriousness and effectiveness of the equipment. According to the reporter, if an actual earth

defect is not dealt with correctly it could potentially lead to an explosion. The reporter would like Tube Lines to investigate these faults to find out the cause and then take the necessary action to fix them.

### Response from LUL and Tube Lines:

The traction earth detection (TED) system located in the line controller's office will show very short duration earth faults when a train crosses over a section gap of less than 15m. For this reason the TED system has an alarm delay switch which should be switched on (this introduces a three second delay before alarming).

This switch should only be switched off when the line controller is locating a known fault. It was found that this switch was in the off position which resulted in lots of nuisance alarms. Having switched this on these nuisance alarms have stopped.



For more LUL reports and responses please visit our website [www.ciras.org.uk](http://www.ciras.org.uk)

Do you have concerns about the safety of your working environment or conditions?  
Have you witnessed a safety critical incident?

If so, please use the space below to report the issue or event of concern. The information you provide will be treated as confidential. We ask you to provide your name and contact details so that a CIRAS researcher can get in touch to discuss your report. Once your report is processed, your report form will be destroyed. CIRAS has NEVER compromised on confidentiality.

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