

Keeping risk simple



**everyone
home safe
every day**

Dear all,

Safety boils down to some pretty straightforward stuff. It's about doing certain things and not doing other things to make sure people don't get hurt.

Of course, to do that properly, we need to understand the everyday behaviours that could cause harm – and exactly how it could happen. This helps us avoid those risks in the right way and know where the dangers are.



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

Now, here's the big BUT.

While it sounds simple, it often isn't, because we're juggling many moving pieces that we always need to keep an eye on – and our senior leaders play a big part in this.

There is a lot of focus on who's responsible if things go wrong and keeping records of who's accountable. Because of this, there's a temptation to write down every single possible risk, in every single situation, just to cover all bases, instead of focusing on what's most likely to happen. Dealing with the risks that happen most often is a different kettle of fish from trying to deal with every single risk imaginable. Both are valid ways of doing things, but they won't work if we mix them up without a good reason.

In practice, teams can be asked to consider every single risk that might occur, and sometimes that makes it harder to see which risks are the really serious ones.

Think about it on the railway. Trips, slips, and falls are the most likely things to cause minor injuries. But getting hit by a train is the most likely thing to cause really serious harm.

We should never rank one type of harm over another, but we are inadvertently asking our teams and suppliers to do just that. This can mean that important decisions about risk are being made based on personal experiences, for example, someone who's seen a nasty electric shock will be really keen to avoid that happening again. That makes sense, and we shouldn't be surprised by it.

While falling when working on electrical equipment is more likely, getting a shock from the power is likely to be more dangerous. Tripping over something by the track is more likely than being hit by a train – but

being hit by a train is likely to cause much worse harm.

The challenge is to think carefully about how we encourage and guide our teams when it comes to managing risk. In our safety conversations, managers must:

- **Contextualise safety;** discuss task-specific hazards using real examples and don't shy away from straight talking.
- **Boost communication;** encourage reporting and involve colleagues in the solutions.
- **Empower ownership;** include our teams in risk assessments and recognise safe actions.
- **Demonstrate visible leadership and ownership;** leaders must actively participate in safety, setting the tone and visibly owning the safety culture. This commitment from the top fosters a genuinely risk-aware environment where safety is a shared value, not just a rule.

As always, if you have any thoughts or feedback about this message you can email me directly [here](#).

Stay safe,
Rob

This update is provided by the Wales and Western Communications team. For any queries, please contact walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk



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