NetworkRail

Standard 019 – Safe Every Time

Step 3: Challenging – plain speaking, and being nice

everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

This week, I want to continue my theme of looking really closely at our trackworker safety activity, again through the lens of making sure the organisation is doing everything it can to ensure the safety of anyone going on or near the line.

It felt remiss to not also reflect on November being men's mental health awareness month. To say just a few words on this, 'talking' about your feelings and concerns is known to be the best form of first aid. When suffering 'imposter syndrome', body-image issues and self-worth issues in the way we all do, there is a definite taboo vibe around this – which is very much 'live and well' in our culture despite us having made great strides on mental health awareness.

**Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director**

A more gender diverse organisation is one where team members are far more likely to be encouraged to speak and share. However, whilst I believe this to be true, I know from my own perspective that talking doesn't always help – and for many of us, internalising our thoughts and feelings will be the first port of call. I think that's as true for female colleagues as it is males.

I believe that, often, people won't be against speaking to others but won't know how to convey themselves and will opt out of sharing. It's with that in mind that I wanted to circle back round to 'decency', as statistically there will be hundreds of people in our teams who are facing into difficulty but decide to come to work and present their work mask, telling each other things are okay, and the weekend has been great when, in fact, the opposite is true.

To those people – you aren't alone. To everyone – let's be decent and kind, recognising that people may be shouldering unseen loads, and that not judging and being kind is often the difference between a good and bad day for most people. Let's be okay with each other.

Don't forget, there's information about the support available to you on our Wales and Western Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub.

Turning to track worker safety, I spent a bit of time last week looking again at the linkage between our 'near misses' and our 'close calls'. For those fascinated by safety, that in itself is an interesting picture. A standalone review of our 'near miss' category incidents will reveal site familiarisation through planning and briefing as being a causal factor. However, when reviewing that alongside the 'close call' data, we see a rapidly expanding picture which includes a growing error rate on work limit definition, and signaller workload and communications.

This week, I therefore want to focus on the third of the 'four Cs' that make up the pillars of our 019 Standard safety campaign, which focuses on stronger **confirming, checking and challenging**, and making sure we **control and manage changes** to our planned work on or near the track. When planning our work, it's crucial to **challenge** and evaluate whether we have made appropriate use of secondary or additional protections to guard against the risks of single-point failure and human error.

This is particularly important because human error is an inherent risk in any safety-critical environment, and depending solely on one protective measure increases vulnerability. Ensuring redundancy in safety systems is an essential part of the risk assessment process.

Some of the principles discussed in our Regional Health & Safety strategy try to really get under the skin of these behavioural threats, and that's what sits behind my ask that we all speak really plainly about:

- Giving ourselves the ability to plan, so that we pace ourselves and use our energies effectively.

- Being aware that, as humans, we are programmed to notice the things that aren't routine to us, and at the same time programmed to stop noticing the things that don't change.

- Recognising the absolute duty we each have to fully understand the challenges of those on the front line, and that paperwork and keyboarding alone will not deliver the standards deserved by our staff.

Our NR/L2/OHS/019 Standard emphasises the importance of planning Safe Systems of Work (SSoW) with the collaboration of multiple roles, such as the Responsible Manager (RM), Planner, and the Person in Charge (PIC), ensuring no single point of failure is allowed through checks and balances.

For instance, the SWP (Safe Work Pack) process ensures multiple verifications – by the Planner, then by the RM, and finally by the PIC – creating a multi-layered defence mechanism to minimise risks.

Appropriate use of secondary and additional protections aligns with the principle of the hierarchy of controls for operational risks outlined in the Standard. By utilising additional protections, such as warning systems or barriers, we create safeguards that mitigate the impact of potential errors, reducing the likelihood of catastrophic consequences.

Furthermore, these protections ensure that even if one layer fails due to human error or system malfunction, other systems will continue to safeguard our workforce.

Ultimately, challenging the adequacy of these protections fosters a culture of continuous improvement, where potential oversights in the risk assessment process are identified and rectified.

Next time, I will look at how we make sure we understand what is happening when our Safe Systems of Work arrangements change, and how we control and manage these changes.

But, for now, please continue to share your thoughts on this crucial safety focus. You can reply directly to me if you wish – I look forward to hearing from you.

Stay safe,

Rob