

Events that demand a relentless safety culture



everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

Within this week's message, I wanted to reflect on three areas. These three topics, in my mind at least, sit side by side and we owe it to consider them as a collective – in terms of how we use our collective thinking and experiences to further our safety journey.

1. Storm Darragh

This one had an unusually unforgiving tone to it, and it manifested itself around the perimeter of both our routes, battering trees and infrastructure in areas which, you've guessed it, are in the most remote locations and can provide exceptional challenges when clearing debris and assessing damage.



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

The strategic picture is one of extreme weather and sustainability but, for now, I purely wanted to recognise and thank the teams mobilised over the weekend for attending and serving our railway. The way the wind was driving the rain meant that it was just appalling for any of our people who were out, and of course this type of work in these locations is a challenge alone, without the added effect of intolerable weather. The level of perseverance, coupled with how much asset was impacted but then recovered in a space of 24 hours, shows the underlying commitment and passion shown by our people, and for that I am humbled and incredibly grateful.

2. Trackworker near miss – Shrewsbury

Last Thursday, we experienced a very serious trackworker near miss involving our teams working near Shrewsbury. The 'closeness' of the potential train impact shouldn't in isolation be taken as an absolute measure of risk – as any staff in the path of trains is already outside any level of risk tolerance. However, in this case, the staff were reported clear by a very small number of seconds, and the train was travelling at a reported 80mph+.

Important initial reactions should be placing our thoughts with the individuals and the driver, who are likely to be suffering the most extreme trauma, and we have to recognise how harrowing an experience this must be for anyone involved. No one comes to work to be in these situations, and that's an important

lens to reflect through. Our railway is complex and variable, and this means our systems have to be built to suit which, you've guessed it, means they are also complex and at times require a degree of variability to provide the safety levels deserved by all.

When I reflect again on Storm Darragh, it's vital to consider our risks through the lens of what we are asking people to do, and the expectations they are seeking to rise to meet. It is understood of the events near Shrewsbury last Thursday that a line blockage had been booked and taken correctly but the staff were found to be working on the open line – and the investigation which is under way will examine the reasons behind that. As I understand it, the task was vegetation management relating to both sides of the railway.

As would have been the case with many people this weekend, I sat pondering on the near miss and wondering how those involved were feeling and what type of weekend they were having. Of course, like many involved, my thoughts also turned to the incidents at Holyhead and Totnes earlier this year. Under very similar circumstances, trackworkers were relying on a line block for their safety, which wasn't in place, and had to jump clear of an approaching train.

I described in my safety update towards the end of October my views on how powerful 'doubt' can be in fighting complacency, and I advocated a significant shift in focus towards a very basic principle which is: "If you haven't checked – are you sure you can claim you know?" Put simply, this means our safety outcomes are so precious to us, that the price of resting on our laurels is never worth taking. Or as I described it at the time, and to put it in even more blunt terms, who is that person in our workforce whose health and wellness it's worth taking the risk of complacency on? This is a carefully positioned source of positive tension, as if overused can lead to those same anxieties which cause people to check they've locked the door or turned off the gas ring a dozen times before leaving the house.

When we reduce this down into our trackworker safety activities it is, of course, our trackworker safety standard NR/L2/OHS/019 'Safety of People on or Near The Line' which is our overall company policy for providing for the risks of harm associated with train injury, and in that regard is the bridge between what we do on a day-to-day basis, and how we document our activities in line with the Health and Safety at Work Act. I wanted to share again with you a couple of observations from late October, which is the 'Rob Cairns' take on the essence of what the policy asks of us.

i. Although it doesn't say as much in black and white, the standard steers the overall process towards making sure that only the relevant and vital details are documented in the 'safe work pack', and whilst it isn't explicit, it infers that a deliberate move away from generic and excessive documentation is expected.

ii. The very obvious 'workarounds', inserting increased levels of flexibility into the system by simply grouping generic work items and locations at a high level, is at its heart precisely the type of practice that 019 seeks to avoid, as by its nature, individual and site-specific risks applicable to the work task will be overlooked.

These two points really resonated in terms of being the very essence of what our trackworker safety should be about, and I remain committed to doing everything I can to bring these principles to life in Wales and Western.

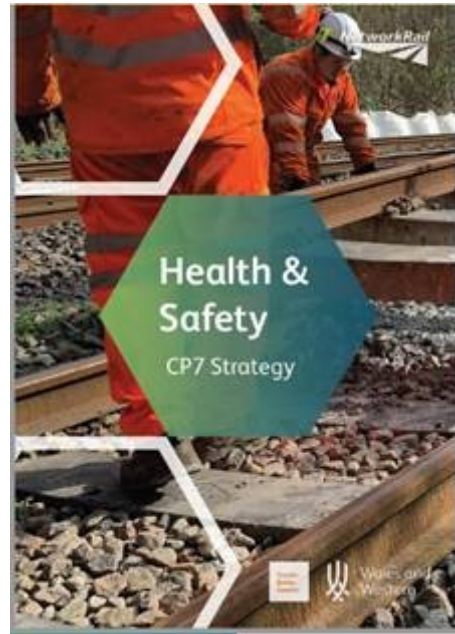
I often speak about the importance of plain speaking, and the need to speak truth to power. We still encounter far too many SSOW (Safe System of Work) packs being approved and verified 12 hours before the shift is planned to commence. We continue to have instances where SSOW packs fail to mention

access and walking arrangements and, finally, the number of SSOW packs which do not assess the risks of not applying secondary protection remains far too high – as does the significant number of unreturned packs each period.

It's because I don't consider a single one of our workforce, or our supply chain, being worth taking any risk on that I have been clear with my exec that we will be unrelenting in continuing to make changes until such a stage that these risks are no longer being taken.

3. Recap – priorities of our regional Health & Safety strategy

Finally, to circle round a number of the critical underpinning dependencies described in our [Health & Safety strategy](#) as being the leadership qualities I wish to insist upon for myself, and all our managers and leaders. These are not tasks that we will attend to; rather they are mindsets and qualities we will uphold in everything we do. From the extensive and valued feedback received from many of you, it's clear that we have a mix of pockets of the very practices we insist on, and areas where these remain 'work ons', for how we manage locally:



- Giving people the ability to plan and prepare, so we use our and their energies effectively.
- Remembering we are programmed to notice the things that aren't routine, and not notice the things that are. Therefore, we will never claim to be surprised by this.
- A safe organisation embraces plain speaking, actively tackling and reducing anything that results in people feeling as though they cannot stand up and say the things which the majority of the organisation otherwise knows to be true. This means our safety outcomes are so precious to us that there is nothing worth letting get in the way of them, as there is not a single person in our workforce whose health and wellness is worth taking any risk of complacency on.

A number of those principles are validated by recent events alongside your feedback – we only earn trust by being clear on our intent and we do that with plain speaking. We do the right thing – even when no one is looking – and we go out of our way to understand our people. We lead fairly and proportionately – on the basis that people only do things that make sense to them, given what they have been asked to do. These core values remain our bedrock, and there is nothing we do that doesn't build out from these. I'm pleased with how our Health & Safety strategy is already beginning to guide how we shape and think about the culture we want, and is highlighting areas where change, or further work, is needed.

As ever, tell me what you are thinking – let me know what's going on. You can [reply directly to me](#) if you wish – I look forward to hearing from you.

Stay safe,

Rob

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