

Using lookout operated warning systems (LOWS)

Issued to: **All Network Rail line managers, safety professionals and accredited contractors**

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Contact: [Dave Tough](#), Programme Interface Manager, Technical Authority

Overview

In the last 12 months we have reduced the amount of unassisted lookout working by over 70% and near-miss frequency by over 50%. The majority of this has been achieved by moving work in to safer access opportunities to our railway, typically using 'protection' methods. During this time the frequency of near miss events while using LOWS warnings has worsened.

In time, we will replace LOWS with semi-automatic and automatic track warning systems. In the interim we need to address and reverse this trend in LOWS near misses.

Every recent investigation into a LOWS incident found the equipment worked as designed. The causes were linked to human error and procedure.

Examples of the reasons are:

- Inadequate communications between the LOWS Controller and the LOWS Lookout during set up.
- LOWS Lookouts not acknowledging the approach of a train resulting in workgroups not receiving a warning to allow them to retreat into a position of safety.
- LOWS Controller identifying the incorrect train.

Immediate action required by all staff who use LOWS

LOWS Controllers:

- What conversations / communications do you have with the Planner when the work safe pack is being produced?
- How do you check the arrangements detailed in the safe work pack?
- How does your plan make sure your communications devices allow you to only speak to your LOWS Lookouts?
- Where is your team's position of safety to enable more than 10 seconds before a train passes over the site of work?
- How does your team help LOWS operators to speak out if they are distracted by work or home issues?
- Are you always satisfied that when positioned by the LOWS Controller you are in a position of safety and able to carry out your lookout duties correctly?
- How do your plans make sure that
 - Emergency contact devices are in place and working?
 - You are in a position of safety during the system set up?
 - What tests of the system occur BEFORE authorising the COSS to start work?
- Please make sure the LOWS team understand how you keep yourselves and your team safe.

LOWS Lookouts:

- Do you always report issues you are encountering both at work and at home which may affect your ability to concentrate as a lookout?

Only by working together can we reduce the likelihood of incidents involving LOWS and other safe systems of work.