

Safety Bulletin

A serious incident has taken place

Use of brush cutter metal blades

Issued to: All Network Rail line managers, safety professionals and RISQS registered contractors

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Location: Newgate Street, Hertfordshire

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Overview

On 2 July 2016 an operative working for Works Delivery Off Track sustained a small impact wound to his inner right thigh whilst carrying out de-vegetation works at an access point.

This happened whilst operating a petrol brush cutter fitted with a three-pronged (star type) metal blade. Upon investigation, it was observed the operator had struck a piece of steel re-bar hidden in the undergrowth, causing a shard to fire off and hit him.

A similar incident had occurred during July 2015 where an operative sustained a serious injury after a 6 inch piece of metal wire was ejected during a de-vegetation operation using a brush cutter fitted with metal star type blades. In light of the recent event, the IP East Midland business area has imposed a temporary suspension on use of brush cutters fitted with metal blades.

Early indications from these events suggest that in both cases the metal blades came into contact with hidden "non-vegetation" materials which resulted in a high velocity object being released causing injury to the operator.

This failure mode is considered to be specific to the star type metal blades. However, an assessment of other brush cutter blade types is planned as part of the investigation to rule out the possibility of similar failure mechanisms.

Discussion Points

Whilst the investigation is ongoing please discuss the following with your team:

- When planning works how do you make sure that the appropriate kit has been selected? What are the alternatives to using brush cutters with metallic blades?
- What can you do to make the mandatory pre-site survey more effective in identifying potential hazards hidden behind or underneath vegetation?
- What can you do to make the pre- and post- task inspection of equipment, including brush cutters, more effective?
- How can you make you and your colleagues more aware of the controls required by the task risk assessment and make sure these are implemented each time?
- How can you make sure that all metallic off-cuts or other rubbish from our works are removed and disposed of appropriately?

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