

MPV struck branch resulting in brake failure and train runaway

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

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Location: Markinch, Fife, Scotland Route

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Overview

At approximately 04.00 on 17 October 2017 a Multi-Purpose Vehicle (MPV) was travelling between Ladybank and Markinch when it struck a branch which had blown from a third party tree during high winds.

At this stage the assumption is that the train's braking system became disabled due to the branch travelling sufficiently under the solebar of the MPV to cause damage to the air pipes and releasing the brake distributor cord on both the vehicles.

This allowed the MPV to start rolling backwards and at this point, as the train began picking up speed, the driver and operator both jumped from the machine with both sustaining injuries.

The driverless MPV ran for a distance of over 4 miles, in the wrong direction, back toward a point between Thornton North Junction and Thornton South Junction before stopping of its own accord at low point on the route.

The MPV was hauled from Thornton to Slateford where it was immediately quarantined.

The meteorological interpretation from our weather provider of the actual mean and gust speed at the time and location of this event confirmed that whilst the wind could be considered high it was not considered extreme and did not breach the extreme weather trigger thresholds.

Both the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) and Network Rail are conducting investigations into the event.

Discussion Points

While we are investigating the incident please discuss the following with your team:

- What contingency arrangements apply following a report of high winds/severe weather events?
- What is your understanding of the operational procedures for managing risk post an adverse/extreme weather event and are they clearly understood and consistently applied?
- What immediate actions are to be taken on receipt of an emergency GSM-R Rail Emergency Call?
- How should a Signaller manage a train which is declared a runaway?
- How do you identify and report trees close to the railway boundary which concern you?

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