

De-vegetation near miss

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

Ref: NRB22-01

Date of issue: 03/02/2022

Location: Uphill Junction, North Somerset, W&W Region

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Overview

On Friday 14 January at 13:10, a de-vegetation team, with approval from the COSS, made the final cut to fell a small Ash tree (around 4m tall and 150mm diameter) at the top of a cutting slope, just over 3m from the running line.

The tree fell where expected but bounced, falling into the cess with some branches encroaching onto the open line. The team had not used a guide rope as specified in the planned method.

A vegetation operative grabbed the butt end of the tree to try and drag it up the cutting slope, whilst doing so he dragged it onto the open line. The chainsaw operative got down from the bank to help remove the tree from the open line. The COSS alerted the two operatives of an approaching train.

The separated system of work should have kept the team at least two metres from the open line at all times. But the two contractors accessed the track to move the tree.

Both operatives were able to move to around two metres away from the line by the time the train passed them. The train used emergency brakes but hit branches and scattered debris. No one was physically injured.

This is one of several recent safety incidents involving de-vegetation works beside the track, each of which could have been much more serious.

Discussion Points

- How do you assure that vegetation teams are following processes and adhering to methodologies?
- When should the tree be roped and secured prior to cutting?
- What immediate action should be taken when something falls foul of the line?
- Is this a common working practice in the culture and behaviour of similar activities? What do you feel would help prevent this from happening?