

Shared Learning

Key learning following a serious incident



Timber sleeper left on track following handback

Issued to: All Network Rail line managers, safety professionals and Principal Contractors

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Location: Ladbroke Grove

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Overview

In connection with planned engineering works, a timber sleeper was laid in the vicinity of the blue 'till dawn' lamp across the 4 foot of the Up Main Line at Ladbroke Grove. The sleeper was intended to informally highlight the isolation limit and to physically impede on track plant from passing.

Upon completion and hand-back of the 54 hour possession on 27 November 2017 the sleeper was not removed and was subsequently struck by a Heathrow Express train.

Underlying causes

There is no industry standard on signage or consistent method of demarcating isolation limits/boundaries.

The lack of a consistent method of demarcation in our industry may lead to confusion among those who plan our track protection and those working on the ground. Principal Contractors teams working in different part of the country may see different methods deployed.

Investigation found that during the planning for these works the possibility of using a physical marker was discussed but no formal agreement was made and therefore neither the Task Briefing documents, Safe Work Pack, nor any other documentation identified this.

The sleeper was placed without notice to or the permission of the PICOP and no record was made of the placement.

The investigation found that the use of the sleeper in the manner used at Ladbroke Grove, and other ad-hoc means of supplementary protection, is not uncommon.

The use of the sleeper in this situation was not a method briefed to the staff, yet staff placed the sleeper without question when instructed to do so.

Key message

Where a physical barrier is warranted by the risk assessment, this should be identified in the planning process and communicated to all relevant staff. Informal arrangements must not be implemented.

Arrangements must be in place to ensure all persons accessing the infrastructure understand of the protection arrangements in use - and understand the limits of the work sites, their work area and areas beyond which they must not pass.

Encouraging questioning of the planned arrangements can play an important role in checking understanding and in confirming their robustness.

The Worksafe Procedure is available for staff to halt work if protection varies from that which was briefed - whether less or more protection is in place, or if staff are asked to do something outside of the plan.

Copies of Shared Learning documents are available on [Safety Central](#)