

## Use of brush cutters fitted with metal blade for de-vegetation works

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

**Ref:** NRA 16/10 Update 1

**Date of issue:** 08/01/2018

**Location:** Newgate Street, Hertfordshire

**Contact:** Malcolm Miles, Head of Plant



Figure 1 - Stihl brush cutter with shredder blade and correct protective guard fitted.

## Overview

On 2 July 2016, an operative was using a metal blade brush cutter at an access point when the brush cutter blade hit a metal object hidden from view in the undergrowth. This resulted in a metal shard being ejected which pierced the inner right thigh of the operator.

A safety bulletin was subsequently issued (NRB 16/13), and a root cause investigation launched. No national ban on use of metal blade brush cutters was imposed as a result of this incident.

While the first investigation was underway, two similar incidents involving metal blade brush cutters occurred.

Both incidents involved a metal object hidden in the undergrowth being struck and a shard of metal being ejected beyond the 15 metres exclusion zone inflicting injuries.

A further Safety Advice was issued (NRA 16/10) which prescribed some additional PPE for use when brush cutting.

This update replaces the earlier NRA 16/10. The significant change is to the additional PPE requirements which now include ballistic clothing instead of forestry clothing.

## Immediate action required

Use of metal blades on brush cutters for de-vegetation works shall ONLY be permitted when the control measures below have been put in place.

### Equipment and Competence

- The tool and equipment supplier/maintainer must ensure that the brush cutter protective guard is undamaged/untampered with and correctly fitted (See Figure 1). They must also check that the correct type of blade is fitted and it is in good condition. If either of above is defective, the brush cutter must be quarantined until repaired.
- All operators carrying out de-vegetation works must possess the required level of training and competency. This must be checked and confirmed via Sentinel for Network Rail Staff, or authority to work card system for Contractors.
- Brush cutters must not be used left-handed. Use in right handed mode offers the optimum protection to the operator during de-vegetation.
- Operators should work their way down into the vegetation in layers enabling the operator to identify 'hidden' items inside the foliage that were not visible during the original site survey.

### Additional PPE requirements

- Specialist PPE is required in addition to the standard PPE set out in the Task Risk Control Sheet (NR/L3/MTC/0003/SP021) this is to ensure adequate protection for all parts of the body. Specialist PPE is made available in the Network Rail catalogue. This includes:
  1. Item 500348, Hi vis Vulture ballistic trouser, orange.
  2. Item 801070, Hi vis Breatheflex jacket, orange
- Contractor organisations are required to have equivalent controls in place.

### Exclusion zone

The minimum exclusion zone shall be extended from 15 metres to 30 metres. Where personnel on site have to work within this 30 metres demarcation, they must be fully clothed with the appropriate PPE as detailed above. If anyone not wearing the appropriate PPE comes within 30 metres of the operator the cutting operation should be stopped immediately. The team leader/supervisor shall be responsible for ensuring this exclusion zone is enforced both within and outside of the boundary.

Copies of Safety Advice are available on [Safety Central](#).