

Manual handling of steel sleepers

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

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Overview

Following a previous accident, ORR issued an Improvement Notice requiring a risk assessment of the tasks involved in moving and fine alignment of steel sleepers. This was communicated in safety bulletin [NRB 18/07](#).

Steel sleepers weigh over 80kg each and the weight is increased when supplied with chairs attached (88kg with fast clip chairs attached).

Risk assessments have been carried out as part of the response to the enforcement action by Wales Works Delivery with support from the STE Ergonomics Team.

The final results of the risk assessments will be communicated separately, however there are some important immediate actions required where steel sleepers are used which are detailed below.

These actions shall remain in force until alternatives are proven to be safe and are communicated in an update to this Safety Advice.

Immediate action required

1. It is prohibited to lift and carry steel sleepers by manual means, apart from fine alignment as described in the text in the right-hand panel.
2. Mechanical means must be used to lift, move and position steel sleepers. Suitable mechanical means are listed in bullet 3 below.
3. Specific machines exist that are designed to lift and place steel sleepers (e.g. from GOS and McCulloch) which should reduce any manual handling to a minimum. If these are not available, an RRV or other mechanical lifting device should be used.

Manual handling may be used for re-positioning the sleepers only over short distances (fine alignment). This requires a four-person co-ordinated team lift with lifting tongs.

Nips designed for concrete sleepers must be used for this task (iStore ref: 0039/068275 or 0039/069333). The existing steel sleeper tongs do not support an upright two-handed posture when lifting and are therefore prohibited from use for this task.

There is currently no safe method for lifting a sleeper off a trolley and this task is therefore prohibited.

Alternative methods or tools for lifting sleepers may only be used if supported by a suitable and sufficient risk assessment.

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