

Near miss with a track worker

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

Ref: NRL19-14

Date of issue: 21/10/2019

Location: Between Horley & Gatwick Airport Station (Southern)

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Overview

At 23:24 hrs on 2 December 2018, a track worker narrowly avoided being struck by a train between Horley and Gatwick Airport stations, on the boundary between Surrey and West Sussex. The track worker was a controller of site safety (COSS) who, together with a strapping operative, had gone onto the railway to remove short circuiting straps.

The COSS moved out of the path of the train, around one second before it reached him, when it was travelling at around 35 mph (56 km/h). Nobody was injured.

Underlying causes

The Network Rail isolation planning process meant that BAM Nuttall planners lacked the information needed for them to establish the exact location at which work was to be carried out on the track.

The COSS recognised that the planned system of work lacked adequate protection from train movements, but undertook the task without implementing an alternative safe system of work. He wasn't challenged by a colleague.

The planners lacked the skills and experience needed to understand this and so provided a system of work which provided no protection from train movements at the actual location of the task

Network Rail isolation processes did not provide planners outside Network Rail with sufficient information to always be able to plan safe systems of work.

Key message

The RAIB investigation has identified the following important learning points:

- It is essential that track work is undertaken in accordance with the approved safe system of work, or after following the appropriate formalised system for establishing an alternative safe system of work.
- Challenging inappropriate safety behaviours, and applying a work safe process (stopping work if safety concerns are not resolved) when appropriate, are essential for everyone's safety.
- Safe work planners must seek additional information before completing a safe system of work pack if they lack the detail of the task needed to confidently plan it safely.
- The value of sounding the train horn as a warning if drivers see people in, or possibly in, a position of danger was demonstrated during the Gatwick incident when it almost certainly saved the life of a worker involved. The rule book requires the warning to be given as repeated short horn blasts.