

Unauthorised Open Line Working

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

Ref: NRB21-07

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Location: Newhouse Barton, Western Route.

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Overview

On 21st June two track workers were patrolling and checking rail temperatures. They were walking in the 4-foot on a curved section of track without adequate sighting when a train approached. They reached a position of safety just three seconds before the train passed them.

The work was planned in a line blockage with additional protection. But the protection had been refused by the green zone access controller (GZAC). The planner didn't know the team's normal arrangements for escalating refused line blockages; the Safe Work Pack (SWP) was not amended before being authorised by the Responsible Manager and issued to the Person In Charge (PIC).

The location was known to have poor mobile phone reception so the PIC should have used a landline or satellite phone to call the signaller. But those phones had been in use the night before and were on charge in a welfare van, not accessible to the team.

Despite being unable to contact the signaller to arrange protection through a lineside request the two track workers continued with the task without a safe system of work or suitable SWP.

Unassisted lookout working is being phased out across Network Rail in 2021.

This incident remains under investigation.

Discussion Points

- How do you escalate Line Blockage rejections?
- How do you demonstrate you are responsible for your own and other's safety?
- What can you do to reinforce compliance with the life saving rule that requires plans and permits to be in place before work is done?
- How can you encourage people to use the worksafe procedure, raise safety concerns and feel supported when they do?