



## Cable breach during rail burning activity

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

Ref: NRB23-04

Date of issue: 17/04/2023

Location: Totnes, Devon

Contact: [Mark Dobson](#), Programme Engineering Manager, Route Services



## Overview

**Colleague unknowingly hits cable leaving them in a state of shock and taking down the signalling power.**

On Thursday 9th March 2023 at approximately 21:20 in Totnes, Devon, a supply chain colleague was burning scrap rail into 20ft pieces within the cess area of the infrastructure as it needed removing.

They couldn't see the 650v cable which supplied power to the signalling system. It was buried just under the surface of the wet ballast underneath the rail.

The cable had no protective routing and you could only see it intermittently on top of the ballast at points along the cess.

The cable sheathing was burnt through, causing a large bang and flash, and significant signalling power loss within the Totnes area.

The individual was not physically hurt but were in a state of shock. They were taken to hospital, accompanied by another operative, for precautionary checks.

The cable was repaired by the local S&T Fault Team, and normal working resumed at 04:15.

All High Output rail burning activities have been suspended, while we review if any additional controls are necessary.

The incident is currently under investigation by Network Rail.

## Discussion points

- What are the benefits of pre work surveys and risk assessments regarding potentially vulnerable equipment?
- What work do you have planned that might affect cables?
- The outcome of these surveys and risk assessments may influence where tasks such as the one in this incident are undertaken.
- What checks do you do before starting work, to make sure that you don't disturb cables?