

Effective communication - the cornerstone of a safe railway



**everyone
home safe
every day**

Hello everyone,

When it comes to workplace safety, clear and concise communication can make all the difference.

The best laid plans can fail when communication is poor, and that might be due to a total lack of communication or perhaps communication which is unclear or interpreted incorrectly. Poor communication can take many forms.

We all have a responsibility to make sure we get home safe every day and to achieve this we must make sure that our safety critical communications are given the time and attention they deserve. Without the proper attention, we hinder our safety culture and potentially contribute significantly to an unsafe workplace where accidents are more likely to happen.



**Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director**

A recent example demonstrates what can happen when communication is not carried out effectively. We carried out an investigation in the Reading area whereby the ES (engineering supervisor) was acting as a PSS (possession support staff) and instructed the signaller to authorise a train into a possession. The ES should have remained at the protection and awaited the train but walked towards it on an effectively open line, contrary to the instructions of the PICOP (person in charge of possession). This resulted not only in an irregularity but more importantly a situation where misinterpreted communications could have resulted in a situation where one of our colleagues was injured or worse.

I vividly recall the early afternoon of 4th Dec 2012 when working on the GNGE (Great North, Great Eastern) project, at the time I was in the supply chain and we were acting as Principle Contractor for the works. The project was relying on alternating line-blockages based on traffic patterns as a means of attending to work. There had been an error in the communications that day with the signaller at Saxilby signal box, and one of our workers was fatality struck by a train which was travelling on the line he

understood to be closed. The events were just horrific, he was 22 years of age. I recall attending the funeral at Rose Hill crematorium in Doncaster, but then was asked to leave the proceedings by the undertaker at the request of Scotts mother as I was identified as having being one of the managers on the railway. I cant really describe how harrowing that was, and I've never reflected on safety in the same way since the afternoon of that funeral.

Communications within possessions and worksites have a clear and defined process. The PICOP will be responsible for the taking of the possession and the authorisation of movements anywhere within the possession other than a work site. The Worksite is the responsibility of the Engineering Supervisor, and this chain of command must always be followed, with communication being clear and concise. Asking the recipient to repeat back to make sure they've understood what you're asking is part of the process. Do not assume that everything you have communicated has reached your audience in the intended manner. It is important that all parties must come to a clear understanding of the instruction; failure to do this should result in work being paused until a clear understanding is reached. If in doubt take 5, stop and check.

Understanding instructions is not just about exchanging words; it's about fostering a safety conscious environment. So, lets prioritise good communication so that we can create a workplace where safety thrives, incidents are minimised, and colleagues feel empowered to protect themselves and each other.

I know that the railway is an exciting but challenging place to work; it requires dedication to be the best that we can be and deliver what we need to deliver all of the time – after all we're only human. But safety cannot be negotiable. Our emotions can influence how we behave, how we perceive risks and potential outcomes and ultimately how we communicate. This can all create an unsafe working environment. Let's all commit to being mindful of being respectful and kind as well as exercising patience with each other so that we can be safer in the delivery of our possessions and worksites.

To support you, build capability and confidence, the trackforce safety team are running safety critical comms workshops. Please contact Sam Rivers to book your place.

Stay safe

Rob



Great



Okay



Poor

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