

The importance of adhering to correct competencies and licenses



everyone
home safe
every day

Hello everyone,

Today, I want to emphasise the critical importance of adhering to correct competencies and licenses within the railway industry.

Railway operations are complex and require specialised skills and knowledge to ensure the safety of passengers, employees, and the general public. Competencies in areas such as maintenance, signalling, and safety protocols are paramount.

By requiring the right individuals to obtain and maintain the necessary competencies and licenses, we significantly reduce the risk of accidents and ensure the well-being of everyone we work with.

One of the most well-known instances of competency failure was at Clapham Junction in 1988 where a driver was incorrectly shown a less restrictive signalling aspect as a result of inadequate working practices.

It left a loose, and uninsulated wire hanging in a location case which came into contact with a live circuit and 35 people lost their lives. The technician concerned with the wiring error reported to me in 2010 -12 when I was RD Westinghouse, Swanley and I can only say how I observed the devastating effect it also had on him as an individual.

More recently in October 2022 at South Wingfield, Derbyshire, two trains nearly collided as they entered the same signalling section. The Rail of Investigation & Accident Branch (RAIB) investigation found that, following engineering work during the night, the signalling system was not working as it should be due to incorrect wiring. Further investigations found that the SMTH hadn't followed the correct testing processes on completion of the work. The RAIB highlighted that although the Signal Maintenance Tester held the



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correct competence, they didn't hold an Institution of Railway Signal Engineers (IRSE) license as mandated by Network Rail standards.

The IRSE licensing scheme provides assurance and defines the competence requirements of individuals carrying out signalling and telecoms-based functions covering design, implementation, installation, testing, and maintenance. This is the accepted cross industry benchmark of competence and serves as a validation of an individual's proficiency in their respective roles, activities, and tasks.

These licenses represent a commitment to excellence and a recognition of one's capability to perform tasks safely and efficiently. By upholding the standards required to obtain these licenses, we uphold the integrity of the railway industry as a whole.

There has been a rise in SMTH irregularities in the last 5 years within Network Rail and with other Competent Signal Maintenance Testers (SMTH) and in many incidents we have seen, staff have held the correct competencies, but have failed to adhere to process in practice. Highlighting the importance of both technical competence and professional integrity.

A recent example on Western saw a bare wire found hanging in Laira, relay room, Plymouth, which is chillingly similar to the cause of the 1988 Clapham incident. Examples like this challenge our culture and corporate memory and we must do better.

To ensure all of our colleagues are compliant there have been many changes to process including 3rd party validation and the digitising of the process' and standards so everyone can have access to up to date, valid information at all times for them to deploy as required. We have changed the competence framework and introduced alternative competencies for those that manage SMTH activity, to ensure that SMTH is only held by those who regularly practice and demonstrate competence.

Having the correct competencies and licenses are not just a matter of regulatory compliance; it is about ensuring safety, upholding standards, and fostering trust and professionalism. We must all commit to maintaining the highest level of competency and accountability in our respective roles for our colleagues and the passengers travelling on our railway everyday.

Stay safe

Rob



Great



Okay



Poor

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