

## Use of brush cutters fitted with metal blade for de-vegetation works

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

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Protective guard fitted incorrectly



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## Overview

Following an accident on 2 July 2016 involving a metal blade brush cutter where a piece of metal shard pierced the inner right thigh of the operator an investigation was launched and a safety bulletin ([NRB 16/13](#)) issued.

Whilst this investigation was ongoing two new incidents involving metal blade brush cutters occurred. On 21 July 2016 at the East Usk Yard on the West Wales Infrastructure Project (IP) a piece of metal wire hidden in the undergrowth was ejected beyond the 15 metres exclusion zone, inflicting a 3 inch cut on the left cheek of a COSS (Controller of site safety) at the work site.

On 14 September 2016 at Ouse Valley Viaduct access point a piece of wire was ejected during de-vegetation works and struck the operator's arm.

The instructions below have been developed between Network Rail and equipment manufacturers to control the risk of injury so far as reasonably practicable.

## Immediate action required

Use of metal blades on brush cutters for de-vegetation works shall ONLY be permitted when the control measures below have been put in place.

### Equipment and competence

- The tool and equipment supplier/maintainer must ensure that the brush cutter protective guard is undamaged/untampered with, and correctly fitted (see figure 1) and check that blades are in good condition and fitted correctly. If either of the above is defective, the brush cutter must be quarantined until repaired.
- All operators carrying out de-vegetation works must possess the required level of training and competency. This must be checked and confirmed via the Sentinel system for Network Rail staff or the authority to work card system for Contractors.
- Use of brush cutters for de-vegetation must be considered during the task planning process as a "right handed" operation. This has been confirmed by the manufacturers as the operational design intent. Use in right handed mode offers the optimum protection to the operator during de-vegetation.
- Operators should work their way down into the vegetation in layers enabling operators to identify 'hidden' items inside the brush that were not visible when the original survey was undertaken.

### Additional PPE requirements

Forestry PPE is required in addition to the standard PPE set out in the Task Risk Control Sheet (NR/L3/MTC/0003/SP021 Issue 4). This is to ensure adequate protection for all parts of the body.

Forestry PPE will be made available on the Network Rail catalogue. This includes:

1. Forestry jacket conforming to EN ISO 20471 GO/RT protection class 3;
2. Forestry trousers conforming to EN ISO 20471 GO/RT protection class 3;
3. Visor faceshield conforming to N254/274000;
4. Neck cover protection conforming to N271/252000;
5. Forestry gloves conforming to EN388 and EN420.

### Exclusion zone

The minimum exclusion zone shall be extended from 15 metres to 30 metres. Where personnel on site have to work within this 30 metres demarcation they must be fully clothed with the appropriate PPE as detailed above. If anyone on site not wearing the appropriate PPE comes within 30 metres of the operator the cutting operation should be stopped immediately. The Team Leader/Supervisor shall be responsible for ensuring this exclusion zone is enforced at work sites.

Copies of Safety Advice are available on [Safety Central](#).

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