Safe use of manually propelled rail handlers (iron men) - Issue 2

Issued to: All Network Rail line managers, safety professionals and RISQS registered contractors
Ref: NRA 18/04
Date of issue: 23/05/2018
Location: National
Contact: Malcolm Miles, Head of Plant

Overview
This Safety Advice is being re-issued following a review by the STE Head of Plant team to confirm the on-going actions that are required for the safe operation of this equipment.

On 1 November 2014 a group of track workers were moving 2 x 52ft pieces of rail for approximately a mile and a quarter on the line between Pantyffynnon Jcn and Gwaun-cae-Gurwen (GCG) in Wales using two pairs of manually propelled rail handlers (MPRH).

The MPRHs were being operated down a gradient which was up to 1 in 40, with the load for each pair being just short of 1 tonne. The rail head was contaminated with leaves and it was raining heavily at the time.

Both pairs of MPRH experienced difficulties during braking; this resulted in them gaining speed to the point the operators could no longer control them. One of the operators of the first pair received a graze injury and another suffered from shock.

The first pair ran away for approximately 5 miles crossing several level crossings including narrowly avoiding a team working on the first. The second pair was brought to a halt at the first level crossing. Subsequent inspection of the brakes shown them to be worn.

Immediate action required

Ongoing Actions
Manually propelled rail handlers shall not be used on gradients greater than 1 in 150 (1:150) until further notice from the Head of Plant.

ALL operations involving manually propelled rail handlers, irrespective of any gradient restrictions, shall:

- Be planned in accordance with the requirements of NR/L2/RMVP/0200.
- Consider and apply the relevant requirements of NR/L2/OHS/019.
- Only use ‘in service’ and fit for purpose units.
- Be operated in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Be operated in conjunction with a detailed work plan and risk assessment.
- Be operated by the correct number of competent staff as detailed in the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Have brake tests performed by competent staff at the start of shift and once mounted on rail.

Note: Network Rail shall undertake self assurance for manually propelled rail handler activities in line with NR/L3/MTC/MG0221.

Copies of Safety Advice are available on Safety Central.