

Maintaining safety focus during the COVID-19 pandemic

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

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Contact: [Investigation & Assurance](#)



Overview

Several safety investigations over the past few weeks have indicated some people being distracted by the widespread focus on COVID-19, undermining their attention to normal safety arrangements. It is clear that awareness about social distancing is widespread, but in some cases an over-riding focus on the virus has led to safety precautions being compromised.

Unsafe practices include some which have led to serious accidents. Early investigation findings have pointed to people being focussed on complying with social distancing but in doing so, not complying with other vital safety measures. For example, by walking into an unsafe area to keep social distance rather than waiting for colleagues in the safe area to move aside.

At least two road traffic collisions have been linked to the COVID-10 controls. Where more people are driving road vehicles to and from site, it is especially important to manage fatigue risks.

In another instance, a driver involved in an accident was distracted by texting a family member about childcare during the lockdown. And in a third, a person made a mistake when laying protection for a night shift worksite after children at home during the school closures led to them being unable to rest and becoming fatigued.

In other examples, some established and important safety arrangements have been compromised due to locally-derived changes that have not been properly risk assessed and endorsed beforehand. Emergency changes to company standards have all been rigorously assessed to identify unintended consequences. But one team decided locally not to issue electrical permits to work on overhead line in efforts to reduce virus transmission risk. Issuing and later cancelling Form C or Conductor Rail Permits remains vital to ensure strict discipline in isolations.

Immediate action required

- Social distancing remains a key control to limit COVID-19 risks. But it is vital that we all remain focussed on life-threatening safety risks too.
- Stay focussed and never compromise safety arrangements as you comply with COVID-19 controls.
- If you think you may not be rested and fit to work or drive, say so before you start your shift.
- If you believe a standard process should change to reduce COVID-19 transmission risk, that must be risk assessed first. Simple measures like plastic folders and site gloves can manage document transmission risk and maintain permit discipline.