



Rail Safety Briefing

May 2026

Monthly Topics

Latest News

- Safety Critical communications; Assessment Monitoring
 - Identify & Establishing Contact
 - Delivering Clear & Accurate Messages
 - Listening & Receiving Information
 - Confirming Understanding
 - Agreeing Next Steps
 - Professional Communication Behaviours
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 - Positive Safety Culture

Important regular reminders

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Purpose of this Briefing

The Network Rail standard **NR/L3/OPS/301** details how companies shall collate, manage, and monitor safety critical communications of their staff and contractors. Any job task that could affect the safety of workers, trains, or moving plant on the infrastructure must be recorded, and the safety critical conversations taking place are to be assessed to ensure that safety critical workers are maintaining effective and reliable standards during the calls.

All COSS's will already understand that calls to a signal box are already recorded and monitored, however this new Network Rail standard places additional requirement for all safety critical calls to be recorded and assessed.

This briefing explains the standards and behaviours expected during safety critical communications within railway operations. It is intended to help staff understand what good quality safety critical conversations should sound like during operational activities such as line blockages, possessions, worksite communications, signalling activities, protection arrangements and emergency situations.

Safety critical communications should always be clear, concise, professional, and structured. The aim is to ensure that all parties involved reach a complete and accurate understanding before any operational activity takes place.

Guidance for Staff Undertaking Safety Critical Communications
Aligned to NR/L3/OPS/301, RIS-8046-TOM and GE/RT8000 Rule Book Principles

1. Identity & Establishing Contact

- Good safety critical communications begin with all parties clearly identifying themselves.
- Individuals should clearly state their name, role and location where appropriate.
- Operational conversations should remove ambiguity from the outset by confirming exactly who is speaking and where they are operating.
- If identification is unclear or incomplete, clarification should be requested immediately.
- Conversations should demonstrate that both parties are confident that they are communicating with the correct person before operational instructions are exchanged.

2. Delivering Clear & Accurate Messages

- The purpose of the communication should be made clear at the beginning of the conversation. Taking a few minutes to ensure you understand the reason for the conversations expected prior to the start of working is a massive help.
- Information should be delivered in a calm, logical and structured manner.
- Messages should remain concise and avoid unnecessary conversation that may distract from operational safety.
- Only accurate and relevant operational information should be communicated.
- Standard railway terminology and recognised operational phrases should be used throughout.
- Slang, local terminology, or unclear phrases must be avoided.
- Where required, difficult words, signal numbers, train reporting numbers and similar details should be communicated using the phonetic alphabet.
- Times should be communicated using the 24-hour clock format.
- Numbers should be spoken clearly and individually where appropriate to reduce any misunderstanding.

3. Listening & Receiving Information

- Good communication requires active listening as well as clear speaking.
- Individuals should demonstrate that they are listening carefully and processing the information being received. Take notes if you need to, to clarify the details to yourself and help you to repeat back any details accurately if required.
- Questions should be asked where clarification is required.
- Vague or incomplete information should not be accepted without further clarification.
- Conversations should demonstrate that both parties remain engaged throughout the exchange.
- The receiver should remain focused on fully understanding the message before progressing the activity.

4. Confirming Understanding

- Critical information must always be repeated back or summarised to confirm mutual understanding.
- Repeat-back is a key control measure within railway operations and helps prevent misunderstandings and errors.
- Any errors, inconsistencies or missing information identified during repeat-back should be corrected immediately.
- Safety critical conversations should continue until all parties are satisfied that a complete and accurate understanding has been reached.
- Challenge and clarification are positive safety behaviors and should be encouraged whenever uncertainty exists.

5. Agreeing Next Steps

- Operational communications should conclude with a clear understanding of what actions will happen next.
- Responsibilities, machine and train movements, protection arrangements and communication expectations should be fully agreed before concluding the conversation.
- Where appropriate, contact arrangements should be confirmed to ensure continued communication can be maintained during the activity.
- Safety critical communications should never end with uncertainty regarding the next operational step.

6. Professional Communication Behaviours

- Safety critical communications should always remain calm, professional, and controlled.
- Individuals should speak clearly and at an appropriate pace.
- Interrupting, speaking over others, or rushing conversations should be avoided.
- Professionalism and respect should be maintained even during stressful or challenging situations.
- Assertive communication is important where safety concerns or uncertainty exist.
- The overall aim of the conversation should always be to exchange accurate information safely and effectively.

7. Human Factors & Communication Risks

- Environmental conditions such as noise, weather, machinery, poor radio quality and fatigue can all affect communication quality.
- Staff should remain aware of factors that may reduce concentration, clarity, or situational awareness.
- Asking for clarification or taking additional time to confirm details due to you not understanding somebody's accent or dialect is not being prejudiced, it is a professional requirement that you never assume what someone is saying and ensure that all parties fully understand what information is being shared.
- Where communication quality is degraded, additional care should be taken to confirm understanding.
- If communication becomes unclear or unreliable, operational activities should be paused until a safe understanding can be re-established.

8. Positive Safety Culture

- Safety critical communication relies upon openness, professionalism, and challenge culture.
- Individuals should feel confident to question unclear instructions or raise concerns where required.
- Good operational communication is not simply about following procedure — it is about actively protecting people from harm.
- Strong communication standards help prevent incidents, improve teamwork, and support safe railway operations.
- Be prepared for what information you expect to send and receive by fully understanding the task at hand and understanding the plan for the work

Key Principle

A good safety critical conversation should leave both parties with a clear, shared, and accurate understanding of the situation, the protection arrangements in place and the actions required before work proceeds.

If you are in doubt about what is expected or there are any gaps in your knowledge, then STOP and clarify the arrangements.



My Sentinel

Do you know that you can view all of your own Sentinel Competencies and Swipe-in record in real time?

- See the competency expiry dates and assessment due
- look at your medical and Drugs and Alcohol test records
- Receive emails directly from Sentinel
- Search and email Sentinel sponsors directly
- Follow this link to the “my sentinel” portal
<https://mysentinel.me/Account/LogOn/?ReturnUrl=/>
and set up your own Sentinel profile

Sentinel guidance on swiping people in can be found here

<https://info.railsentinel.co.uk/resources/sentinel-app-training-videos/>

You MUST BE swiped onto the infrastructure for every single shift.

Three simple swipes

to get everyone
home safe every day



Swipe

1

Sentinel

Controller of Site Safety (COSS) swipes in each team member using their Sentinel card (physical or virtual).

- confirms competence for the task
- verifies sufficient rest



Swipe

2

Sentinel

COSS records the safety brief.

Logs the use of competence during the shift.



Swipe

3

Railhub

Person in Charge (PIC) completes the Authority to Work check between Railhub and Sentinel.

- Sentinel = individuals
- Railhub = safe delivery of work



Why swiping matters

A simple card check is not enough. It:

- ✗ does not verify sufficient rest
- ✗ does not log competence

End of shift

COSS must swipe the team out at end of shift so we can monitor sufficient rest.



Scan to watch
Sentinel training videos

Useful Links

Railway Rule book

Add this website address to your browser favourites to ensure that you always have access to the Network Rail Rulebook modules

<https://www.rssb.co.uk/standards/types-of-standards-and-how-they-work/the-rule-book>

Safety Central

Network Rail share updates of recent incidents, accidents and best practice advice online.

Please get into the habit of checking this website for the latest news;

<https://safety.networkrail.co.uk/tools-resources/safety-bulletins/>

Southern Shield

Southern Shield is a collaborative safety forum that consists of Network Rail Southern Capital Delivery and its principal contractors. On their website they have useful articles and explain the rules of the Southern Shield charter, which are mandatory on some southern sites.

<https://www.southernshield.co.uk/>

NR Standards

New Standards Access Website

Dear Standards portal user,

Following our previous announcement, the upcoming launch of our newly redesigned standards website, is scheduled to go live at the end of June 2026.

This new platform has been carefully developed following extensive feedback from both internal and external users and aims to meet the needs of our customers, industry partners, and stakeholders.

With a modern interface and enhanced functionality, the redesigned site will provide a smoother and more efficient experience for everyone. Key features include:

- Streamlined navigation: quickly find the information you need with improved navigation and integrated AI functionality.
- Mobile responsiveness: enjoy seamless access whether you're on a desktop, tablet, or smartphone, making it easier for non-office-based colleagues to stay connected.
- Improved accessibility: the site has been designed to meet the latest accessibility standards, ensuring that all users can access our content without barriers.

This all-new standards website marks a significant milestone in the Standards Team's digital transformation journey. The website will reflect our commitment to delivering high-quality content that is easy to access to the railway industry.

At this stage, no action is required. Those with current access to the site will be emailed shortly before the new site launches with sign-in details. If you do not currently have access and feel you need access please contact STSupplierSupport@networkrail.co.uk

Thank you for your cooperation as we make this improvement to our services.

Kerry Marchant
Principal Standards and Controls manager
Network Rail

Contact us: STSupplierSupport@networkrail.co.uk

Changes to your shift times and increased fatigue risk

It is important that you notify your consultant as soon as possible if there is a change to your rostered work pattern while working on the Network Rail Infrastructure.

As part of our commitment to you and our obligations to monitor and manage your fatigue, we must always have an accurate understanding of where and when you are working.

In addition, you also have a legal obligation to ensure that you are safe to work, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This states that “Workers have a duty to take care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work”

Do not start work until you are satisfied that the safety arrangements are appropriate to the activity

Never, ever drive while feeling tired

If you are starting to feel fatigued while you are onsite then instigate the work safe procedure. (Detailed below).

	Early Warning Signs of fatigue	• Rubbing eyes • Fidgeting
	Signs of Moderate Fatigue	• Yawning • Frequent blinking • Staring blankly
	Signs of Severe Fatigue	• Difficulty keeping eyes open • Long blinks
	Signs of Stage 1 Sleep	• Head nodding • Microsleeps (sleep episodes that can last as little as a few seconds)

Work-safe Procedure

This is for anyone to use; it works as follows:

If you believe the Safety Arrangements to be inadequate:

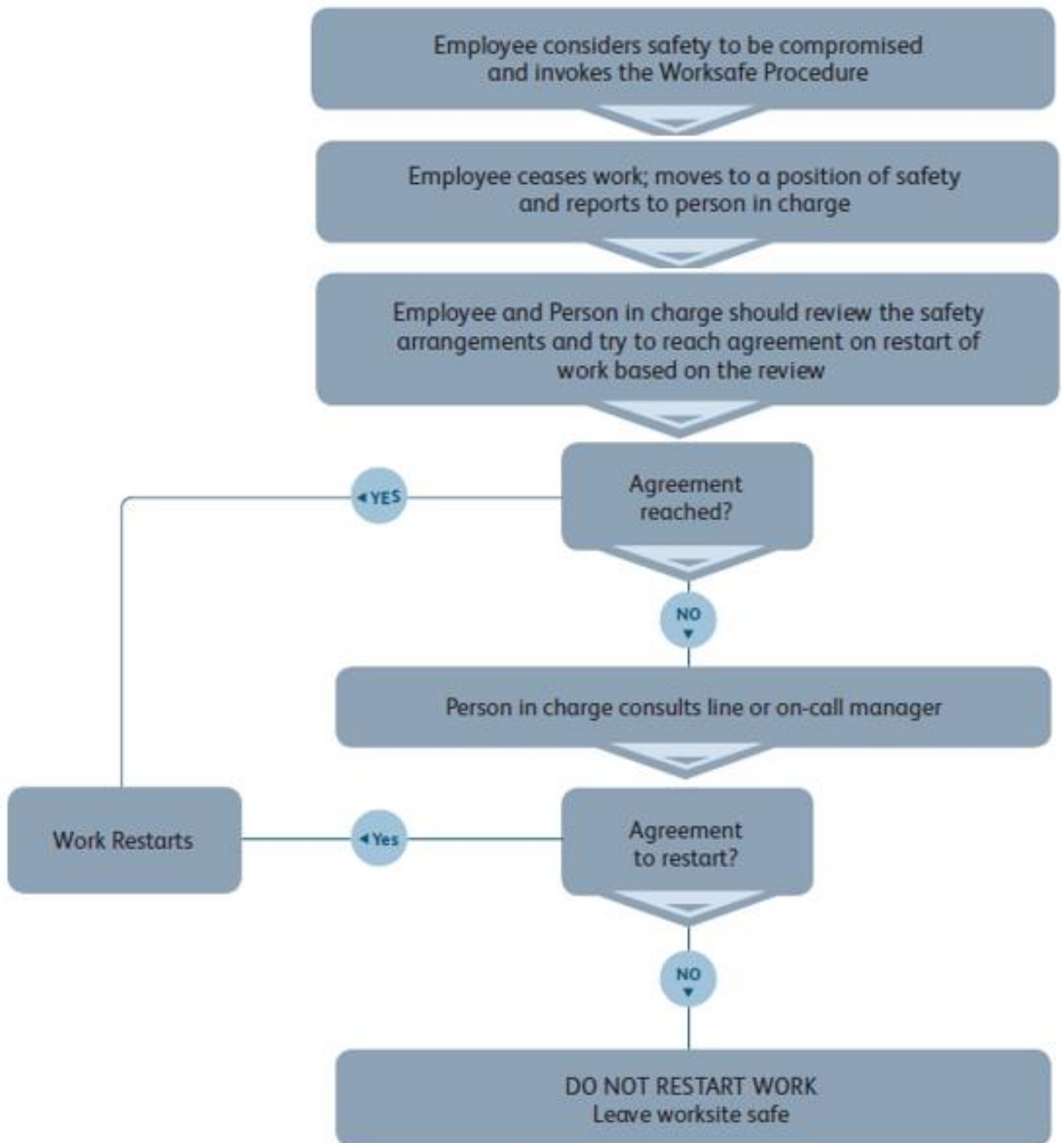
- Stop Work and talk to the Team Leader or person in charge; they should:
 - Review the arrangements
 - Change them if necessary and re-brief

If you are still unhappy **DO NOT RESTART**; escalate to the next level by contacting one of the following:

- The COSS / Supervisor onsite
- Your Line Manager
- Your Safety Rep
- Any member of the management team
- The DU Safety Advisor
- Network Rail Control
- Ask Rail Services on-call 0771 971 7064

Do not start work until you are satisfied that the safety arrangements are appropriate to the activity

Work-safe Procedure



A Breach of the Network Rail Life Saving Rules will trigger a Level 1 Investigation into your actions.

Our Lifesaving Rules



Always be sure the required plans and permits are in place, before you start a job or go on or near the line.



Never use a hand-held or hands-free phone, or programme any other mobile device, while driving.



Always use equipment that is fit for its intended purpose.



Always test before applying earths or straps.



Never undertake any job unless you have been trained and assessed as competent.



Never assume equipment is isolated – always test before touch.



Never work or drive while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.



Always use a safety harness when working at height, unless other protection is in place.



Always obey the speed limit and wear a seat belt.



Never enter the agreed exclusion zone, unless directed to by the person in charge.

CIRAS

CIRAS

Confidential Safety Hotline

If you have a safety concern,
make the right call and report it.

Tell your supervisor, or contact us in complete confidence.
Call 0800 4 101 101 or download our CIRAS reporting app.



 Google Play

 App Store

We find safety in listening.



Scan me

Contact the Rail team

- Ask Rail Services 24 hour on-call 0771 971 7064
- Store this number in your phone in case of an emergency.
- Use this on-call number if you need to contact someone from the company urgently, for example to report an accident / incident or if you are being pressured to do something that you are not comfortable with, such as being asked to exceed the working hours rules etc.
- This number is not to be used to query timesheets or to enquire about vacancies, it is an emergency contact number.
- If you would like to suggest a topic for future safety briefings, or need to talk to someone in confidence then email the Rail HSQE manager Joe Christopherson; joe@askrailservices.com
- Your Feedback is always welcomed, email us at stuart@askrailservices.com

Previous monthly rail briefings

<https://www.askrailservices.com/safety-briefings>