



Rail Industry Safety Notice



RISN No. 24

DRIVER DISTRACTIONS

Background

The Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator (ITSRR) has become aware of an Emergency Order issued by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) of the United States (www.fra.dot.gov).

Emergency Order 26 – [Emergency Order to Restrict On-Duty Railroad Operating Employees' Use of Cellular Telephones and Other Distracting Electronic and Electrical Devices](#) – outlines the potential safety implications of the improper usage of distracting devices.

This issue was highlighted by a recent collision between a freight train and commuter train at Chatsworth, California, which tragically resulted in the deaths of 25 people and injury of numerous others. While this accident is still under investigation, independent investigators have stated that a cellular (mobile) telephone owned by the driver was being used to send a text message within 30 seconds of the time of the accident.

The FRA's Emergency Order raises concerns about rail employees using telephones and other distracting devices during operations, even when procedures are in place to restrict or limit such use. It states that the use of cellular telephones can lead to failures to detect hazards due to drivers focusing their vision on the device rather than scanning the environment or checking instrumentation in the cab.

Failure to detect hazards can also come about due to increased mental workload. As a result, drivers may fail to detect signals, whistle boards or other conditions that could result in accidents. Similarly, the increased mental workload and focus on the device could also impair situation awareness resulting in speeding, excessive braking, poor vehicle handling and missed radio communications.

Action

Following the recognition of the risk of an incident due to distraction, ITSRR suggests that operators consider reviewing:

- risk registers with regards to risks associated with distraction, both of drivers and other rail safety workers

- existing controls for these risks – for example, procedures controlling the risk of using electronic devices such as mobile telephones
- their approach to monitoring and enforcing these controls.

In order to ensure compliance with the safety requirements set out in the *Rail Safety Act 2002*, accredited operators are requested to note this advice and take appropriate action.

For further information contact Colin Holmes, Director Rail Safety Regulation, on (02) 8263 7153.



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