

Report 03/2026: Two track workers struck by a wagon being propelled by a rail crane at Port Glasgow

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RAIB has today released its report into two track workers struck by a wagon being propelled by a rail crane at Port Glasgow, Inverclyde, 15 March 2025.

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Summary

At around 20:30 on 15 March 2025, a wagon, which was being propelled by a rail-mounted crane within an engineering possession, struck two track workers near to Port Glasgow station. The propelling crane, along with two others, was being used as part of the renewal of a section of track within the possession. One track worker became trapped between the wagon and the lifting beam of one of the other cranes and was seriously injured. The second track worker was also trapped under the wagon and suffered minor injuries.

The investigation found that one of the other cranes had lowered a section of track, that was to be used in the renewal, onto the track ahead of the propelling crane and wagon that was moving to collect it. The two track workers were standing on the track close to the track panel discussing where it was supposed to have been set down. The member of staff controlling the propelling crane issued a stop command over the radio that was not received by the crane's driver, and the staff on the track did not recognise that the crane had not stopped.

RAIB found that the operator of the propelling crane was unable to see in the direction of travel and was reliant on radioed instructions from the member of staff controlling the movement on the ground.

RAIB also found that there was no lighting on the leading end of the wagon being propelled by the rail crane that could have alerted the staff to its approach, despite the railway Rule Book requiring this.

A possible underlying factor identified that Network Rail's requirements for the use of duplex communications systems and the use of product-approved equipment were not being complied with, and that Network Rail had no effective assurance processes to check on compliance. A second, possible underlying factor was that operational rules applicable to the rail cranes were not recognised as being relevant to these machines and so were not being applied.

Recommendations

RAIB has made one recommendation to Swietelsky Construction. This deals with reviewing the communications equipment and protocols used when controlling movements of its rail cranes, in relation to Network Rail's standards. This recommendation is also highlighted to other similar operators of rail cranes.

RAIB has also made two recommendations to Network Rail. One deals with reviewing its standards relating to the use of radio communications for controlling movements of on-track machines, while the second relates to reviewing its assurance processes for monitoring compliance with such requirements.

RAIB has highlighted three learning points relating to staff compliance with the requirement to only start work when they have been briefed by a COSS, requirements for lighting on wagons in possessions and the application of safety-critical communication procedures.

Notes to editors

1. The sole purpose of RAIB investigations is to prevent future accidents and incidents and improve railway safety. RAIB does not establish blame, liability or carry out prosecutions.
2. RAIB operates, as far as possible, in an open and transparent manner. While our investigations are completely independent of the railway industry, we do maintain close liaison with railway companies and if we discover matters that may affect the safety of the railway, we make sure that information about them is circulated to the right people as soon as possible, and certainly long before publication of our final report.
3. For media enquiries, please call 01932 440015.

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