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LEVEL CROSSING USERS IN BLYTHE BRIDGE ASKED "WOULD IT KILL YOU TO WAIT?"

The level crossing at Blythe Bridge is among the five worst for reported misuse in the Midlands and drivers are regularly reported trying to beat the lights or swerve around the barriers. In the past five years the barriers have had to be replaced 10 times after being hit by vehicles.

This week, Network Rail and its partners used the opportunity of the International Level Crossing Awareness Day (ILCAD) to remind people of the dangers of misuse by handing out leaflets titled "Would it Kill You to Wait?"

Tragically, hundreds of people are killed globally every year, after taking chances by running red lights, swerving barriers or ignoring warning signs.

Mark Tarry, area general manager for Network Rail said: "We have a good safety record in comparison to many other countries but even one death is one too many. Jumping the lights and ignoring warning signs is sadly a sight we see all too often. Level crossings are safe, but if misused, they all pose very real risks.

"Today's international action day gives us another opportunity to drive home the message that running the risk at a level crossing is just not worth it. By trying to save a few seconds, you could end up seriously hurt or losing your life."

Darren Ward, a driver for East Midlands Trains, added: "We were very pleased to support Network Rail on this worthwhile initiative giving our train drivers an opportunity to talk face to face with the public about the dangers of misusing a level crossing"

PC Philip Morgan said: "We are working closely with Network Rail across the region to improve knowledge and, where necessary, to take action against those who continue to misuse crossings."

He added: "Incredibly some people are still putting their lives on the line by ignoring warning lights and sirens and trying to dash through crossings when trains are approaching. This is hugely irresponsible and dangerous and we will not hesitate to take action against anyone caught doing so.

"Level crossings – and other crossings where road, footpaths and rail cross – are designed to keep people safe. And, when used correctly, that is exactly what they do. But, as the figures suggest, when people ignore the warnings, there can be fatal consequences."

Throughout the day the team handed out leaflets that spell out the chilling truth of taking chances at level crossings, and pose the question: "Would it kill you to wait?"

About Network Rail

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Network Rail is the 'not for dividend' owner and operator of Britain's railway infrastructure, which includes the tracks, signals, tunnels, bridges, viaducts, level crossings and stations - the largest of which we also manage We aim to provide a safe, reliable and efficient rail infrastructure for freight and passenger trains to use Our website: www.networkrail.co.uk

Notes To Editors

Attached video shows a driver becoming trapped under the barriers after trying to beat the lights.

International Level Crossing Day of Action is organised by ILCAD.

ILCAD involves a number of partners from road sector, local authorities, railway partners, BTP, local Police forces, European Transport Safety Council, European Railway Agency, Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER), European Rail Infrastructure Managers (EIM), European Level Crossing Forum (ELCF) and International Union of Railways.

This year UN-ECE Transport Division, the Latin American Railway Association (ALAF) and the Australasian Railway Association (ARA) have joined the campaign.

Participating countries will be carrying out a number of initiatives including awareness events at level crossings, visits to schools, driving schools as well as displaying posters. Some countries will also be broadcasting special safety messages on radio and television.

FACTS ABOUT LEVEL CROSSINGS

- Level crossings are safe if used correctly
- 95% of accidents at level crossings are caused by misuse or error – i.e. drivers ignoring red signals, barriers and klaxons
- There are over 7,600 level crossings both on public and private land that cut across the UK railway network.

Britain - National level crossing incidents - 2009:

- 3,242 recorded incidents of misuse or error (2008 = 3479)
- 14 collisions between vehicles and trains (2008 = 20)
- 13 deaths (2008 = 15)
- 140 near misses between motor vehicles and trains = nearly 3 a week

DON'T RUN THE RISK CAMPAIGN

Network Rail has a public safety awareness campaign on level crossings - Don't Run the Risk. The campaign has been running since 2006 and includes hard hitting TV and radio advertising that illustrates in graphic detail the tragic consequences of misusing level crossings by both motorists and pedestrians.

The campaign runs in parallel with other Network Rail and industry initiatives to minimise the safety risk at level crossings. These include:

- Network Rail's dedicated community safety team which aims to reduce railway crime and provide young people with positive activities to fill their time
- Development of solutions which could lead to the replacement of some crossings
- Development of obstacle detection systems
- Developing better and cost-effective ways of detecting and recording level crossings misuse
- Working with the Police and Crown Prosecution Service to improve the prosecution of offenders

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