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'Don't run the risk' - level crossing safety campaign

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Network Rail has a public safety awareness campaign on level crossings - Don't Run the Risk.

The campaign launched in 2006 and comprises hard hitting TV and radio advertising and a media campaign that supports a dedicated community safety team raising awareness of the dangers of misusing level crossings.

Figures revealed by Network Rail show that hundreds of drivers are dicing with death by ignoring warning signs and lights or weaving round barriers at level crossings.

Last year, there were more than 3200 incidents of misuse at level crossings. On average, nearly three motorists a week were involved in a near miss, where a train narrowly avoided missing them because they ignored warning signs and lights or weaved round barriers. There were 14 collisions between trains and motor vehicles for those that didn't beat the lights.

Pedestrians were also putting themselves at risk with hundreds involved in near misses. If a train hits a person at high speed, there is almost always only one tragic outcome. Sadly, 13 people lost their lives at level crossings in 2009.

Each year, around 55 days of delays to trains and passengers are caused by level crossing misuse, costing Network Rail around £1.8million – money that can't be invested into the railway. The real cost to the industry far exceeds this, as it does not include actual damage to trains or tracks or staffing time and cost.

Network Rail chief executive Iain Coucher commented: "Level crossings are safe, but tragically motorists are too often playing Russian roulette with a 200 tonne train – and tragically some lose their lives gambling at level crossings by running red lights or dodging around barriers. We have a simple message to all: don't run the risk."

Network Rail has also called for the driving theory test to include compulsory question on level crossings to enforce learner drivers' understanding of the Highway Code and stamp out crazy driving behaviour such as dodging around barriers and running red lights as trains approach.

On this, Iain Coucher said: "I'm confident that lives will be saved if motorists learn how to safely use level crossings from the day they pass their test. Our

campaign is raising awareness of the very real dangers of running the risk but we think more can be done to change motorists' behaviour."

The work on this campaign is running 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

FACTS ABOUT LEVEL CROSSINGS

Statistics/ Scale of the problem

STATISTICS

Number of recorded level crossing offences

2005 2839
 2006 3221
 2007 2896
 2008 3495
 2009 3244

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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 7,000 level crossings both on public and private land that cut across the UK railway network.
- British deaths at level crossings are low by international standards – amongst the lowest in Europe and worldwide

For more information please contact :

Media Relations (National)
 t:020 3356 8700
 e: mediarelations@networkrail.co.uk

About Network Rail

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