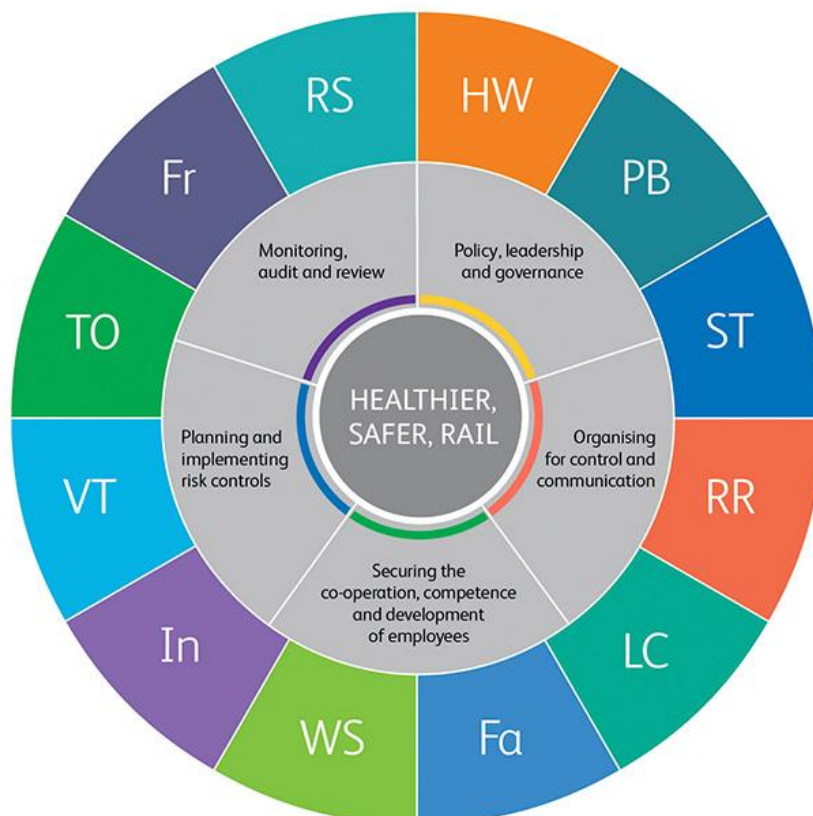


Rail still focussed on improving safety and wellbeing for all

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The 12 priority risk areas are:



Britain's railways have always put health and safety front-and-centre, and the Covid-19 pandemic has not diminished industry's efforts – in fact, it may have even sharpened its focus on safety and wellbeing says rail industry body RSSB.

Britain's railway system is one of the safest and most intensively used rail networks in the world. However, performance has deteriorated in some risk areas, and currently there are concerns around operational risk, trespass, and workforce safety. There is also a stronger appreciation of the importance of health and wellbeing and the impact this has on safety and performance.

The strategy to tackle all this is Leading Health and Safety on Britain's Railways, the challenges published in March and the implementation guide issued in July.

The strategy covers 12 risk areas and priorities for improving rail's capability: · Workforce health and wellbeing · Public behaviour · Station operations · Occupational road risk management · Level crossings · Fatigue risk management · Workforce safety · Infrastructure asset integrity · Work-related violence and assaults · Train operations · Freight derailment · Rolling stock asset integrity

These are all risks which the industry has identified as being easier to mitigate through collaboration and drawing on the benefits of RSSB's data and expertise.

Britain's railways continue to hold a very positive safety record, but industry must continue to collaborate to tackle risks under pressure, says RSSB. The independent rail safety body has published its latest Annual Health and Safety Report for Britain's railways across the last full financial year 2019-20.

The report shows that key safety trends are generally in line with expectations for the 12 months running up to March 2020, just before the Covid-19 lockdown took effect.

It was the 13th consecutive year with no passenger or workforce fatalities in train accidents. There were seven fatalities to passengers or members of the public on stations, and three fatalities to the workforce.

There are concerns about a rise in train accident risk and frequency of signals passed at danger (SPADs), as well as track worker safety and the integrity of safety critical systems that need to be addressed. Health and wellbeing also remain a key area, says RSSB.

These areas are where the strategy kicks in. Its goal is to provide a framework for the collaborative improvement of health and safety performance on the railway.

Among the traditional railway safety issues, health and wellbeing have also come to the fore as an area where despite notable recent achievements, more attention is needed to understand how it contributes to better safety and performance in the round.

There is also recognition that the Covid-19 pandemic is putting additional strain on Britain's railways, not just in terms of the health and wellbeing of the workforce, but also in managing risk proactively under more pressure, with less resource, or as a result of restrictions on people's behaviour and movement.

Front-line staff and senior management are both under immense pressure and so RSSB is keen to ensure personnel are free from unnecessary calls on their time but can still participate in the workstreams remotely.

The Leading Health and Safety on Britain's Railway Executive Advisory Group has been established to act on behalf of RSSB's Board. It will monitor how the strategy is being implemented and provide accountability and support to System Safety Risk Group and The Rail Wellbeing Alliance and their related subgroups.

Rail safety leads are being encouraged to continue working together during the Covid-19 pandemic, using on-line collaboration tools and virtual meetings. Ahead of an official launch later in September, rail companies should start familiarising themselves with the strategy to get a feel for the step change it's aiming for, says RSSB.

Ali Chegini, RSSB's Director of System Safety and Health said: "Britain's railway system is one of the safest and most intensively used rail networks in the world. But we can't take that for granted – it relies on everyone playing their part. As a system we can't just rely on the positive endeavours of individual

companies, it needs everyone to cooperate and consider the bigger picture. That means stepping up to share data and join in the collaborate effort to manage risks.

“The Covid-19 pandemic introduces an extra layer of urgency around dealing with the health and safety risk it introduces either directly or as a by-product of significant changes to the way the railway operates in the face of new operational challenges.

“I recommend industry’s safety leaders become familiar with the updated strategy and take part in its fulfilment through the various groups, projects and programmes we will be kicking off in the weeks and months ahead.”

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