

South Western Railway highlights the impact of thoughtless abuse on frontline employees

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A new campaign from **South Western Railway (SWR)** is highlighting the damaging impact abuse has on its frontline employees.

SWR colleagues can be subjected to a range of abuse, from physical assaults to verbal attacks, including swearing and insults.

SWR said that, while these verbal attacks might be considered relatively 'low-level', the consequences for colleagues can be significant and enduring, impacting their mental health and overall wellbeing.

SWR's campaign aims to reduce the level of pernicious verbal abuse that colleagues suffer, by inviting customers to consider the lasting impact that heat of the moment words, often used in momentary anger, can have.

The operator added that this is especially true when the abuse involves personalised language regarding a colleague's appearance or a characteristic such as their age or gender.

The campaign is directed primarily at customers who wouldn't normally be aggressive, but who might lose their temper during disruption, or because of other issues on their journey, and take this out on colleagues.

Hard-hitting printed and digital posters conveying this message are now on display across the SWR network, depicting four examples of thoughtless abuse staying with colleagues beyond their shift.

The posters show examples of abusive language on everyday household items: a doormat, shower gel, a kettle and a tin of soup, indicating how the abuse continues to play on the minds of colleagues, even while at home.

Frontline colleagues may be on-train guards, colleagues at the gateline, dispatchers, revenue protection officers, community rail officers and any other colleagues who interact with customers on trains or at stations.

The campaign is based on consultations with such colleagues, who shared their experiences of abuse, and encourages customers to be kind. 'Be Kind' badges are being given out to colleagues to help spread the message.

The campaign will be particularly visible on the network during certain events and times of the week, especially when customers are more likely to have consumed alcohol, which tends to be when levels of abuse against colleagues are higher.

A video explaining the impact verbal abuse has on SWR colleagues and the campaign to tackle it can be watched [here](#).

Grant Robey, Senior Network Crime and Security Manager for South Western Railway, commented: "We hope this campaign will bring the human impact of thoughtless abuse to the front of our customers' minds and remind them to be kind to our colleagues, even when things go wrong on their journeys.

"We know that most customers wouldn't purposefully abuse our colleagues; a lot of this behaviour arises when customers lose their temper and make heat of the moment comments.

"Our colleagues come to work to keep everyone safe and they should not expect to face this behaviour. People wouldn't behave like this in their own workplace, so it isn't acceptable in ours."

To help deter abuse and assist with evidence gathering, SWR has also been conducting a phased roll out body-worn video cameras to frontline colleagues since 2021. All SWR guards now have access to them, with gateline colleagues due to have access in the spring.

A recently published study by the University of Cambridge, commissioned by the Rail Delivery Group and British Transport Police (BTP), suggested that body-worn video cameras can reduce the likelihood of assault against the wearer by 47 per cent.

Last autumn, Network Rail published new statistics showing that 9/10 of its workers in the biggest stations in its Southern Region, which includes the SWR network, have suffered abuse, including verbal abuse and physical assaults.

SWR is an industry leader in safeguarding its customers and colleagues, achieving the highest possible score of 100 per cent for its Safeguarding on Rail accreditation by the BTP, demonstrating its commitment to looking after its people.