

SAFETY FOR RAIL ENTHUSIASTS

Disclaimer: This guide is for your information only. There is no guarantee at all that danger of injury or death is eliminated or reduced by these guidelines by these guidelines. No responsibility for your safety is assumed by the author of this article - all activity on or near trains is our undertaken at your own risk!!

INTRODUCTION

The Main Concern

When engaging on train spotting, train travel and rail photography, there are precautions you must take in order to keep safe.

The main concern probably is always that trains are **large moving objects with a huge amount of momentum** – they cannot stop quickly! Trains may also move or shift without warning!

The most important safety point therefore is to keep a safe distance from trains!

- **Use common sense and be alert.**
- **Always try to have someone else with you. Two or more sets of eyes and ears are better than one!**

BY THE RAILWAY LINE

Railway lines are dangerous!

Always try to:

- Where possible stay a fair distance away from the railway line – do not walk in the “four foot”, i.e. on the sleepers in between the rails
- When you are walking alongside the line keep as far away as possible and use any roads or paths in the area that are near the railway lines, in preference to walking right alongside the track. Be especially careful on curves in cuttings or where you cannot see very far along the track.
- If a train is passing, stand well away from the line and track so any wide loads or protruding objects do not hit you.
- If the train is travelling past you at speed, remember that it will generate often considerable turbulence, which may be

enough to “throw” you are? and suck you in towards the train – so stay further away when a fast train approaches!

- Do not assume you will hear a train coming - trains can sometimes (surprisingly) make very little noise! Always keep checking up and down the railway line and again be extra careful in fog and rain.
- Try and learn how the signalling system operates – this will give you a warning if you are near signals, of an approaching train when the signals change from “danger” .
- If you have to cross the track, choose an open and clear area with good distance visibility to do so. Never step on the tracks at points – they can move unexpectedly and cause you to fall or get trapped in the point work
- Be careful when standing on sleepers if they look oily or wet.
- Wear safety or hiking boots.
- Look out for other dangerous objects around track areas – sharp metal objects, nails, broken bottles, glass, spilt chemicals etc.
- Stay well away from the overhead power lines, especially if standing on the edge of cuttings close to the overhead lines.
- Do not sit down close to the tracks -- you may fall asleep without realizing it or you may be too close to the tracks.
- When near the track, do not wait until the last minute to move away – this gives the drivers heart failure!
- When the train whistles or hoots, wave to acknowledge that you have heard it!

BRIDGES, UNDERPASSES AND TUNNELS

Bridges and underpasses are generally dangerous places to be, since there is often limited clearance should a train pass.

- Remember that in South Africa the railway could be regarded as “narrow gauge” almost, with the result that the engines and rolling stock will protrude a fair distance on either side of the physical railway line.
- If you must cross a bridge or go through an underpass be careful and ensure there are not trains around – there is generally a

lack of anywhere safe to stand should a train go by.

- Do not attempt to cross long bridges, or any bridge where visibility is limited, such as during the night or when it is raining.
- Be extra vigilant if it is raining or there is fog – fog reduces visibility and muffles the sound of approaching trains.
- **NEVER ATTEMPT TO WALK THROUGH TUNNELS**

STATIONARY TRAINS

Stationary trains can be dangerous - you should assume that any stopped train may begin to move at any moment. Remember also that attaching a locomotive to a train may move the wagons or cars by several meters. So,

- Never go under a train to cross to the other side. Do not also climb over the couplers or wagons or flatbeds. You will be injured if the train moves, even slightly.
- Do not lean against a stopped train.
- Do not cross the line close to the front or rear of a stationary train or row of wagons or passenger cars.
- Do not climb on stationary engines, unless you have been given permission.
- Do not climb on top of any train – there may be a live wire overhead
- Do not pass between two wagons which are not coupled together – they may be shunted together without warning.

MOVING TRAINS

- Always stand well back from moving trains – there may be items sticking out, or passengers on a train may throw rubbish out.
- Always face a moving train and do not turn your back to it when it passes (say when taking pictures) .
- Remember that fast trains cause wind turbulence of the wind as they pass by may make you fall or be pulled in towards the moving train
- Do not cross the tracks in front of the oncoming train.
- When a train passes by, always be on the lookout for another – do not assume it is now safe to cross the track right away as there may, especially in the case of passenger trains in built-up areas, another train right behind.

- Be careful in areas where there are multiple railway lines – you may be watching one train and be unaware of another approaching!
- If you are caught between two moving trains on adjacent tracks, you should lie down flat in the space between the tracks, away from the ballast. Do not attempt to remain standing or crouch down – the turbulence may throw you around.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Wear bright clothing or a safety jacket.
 - Be careful if you are accompanied by children – keep them under control and away from the line and trains at all times.
 - Be careful in remote or isolated areas, especially if you are carrying camera equipment
 - Be careful on station platforms and do not stand close to the edge when a train is arriving or departing, or if the platform is crowded.
 - Again, stand well back from platform edges if a fast train is passing through.
 - At level crossings, look both ways before crossing, even if you are on foot or the line looks disused.
 - If a level crossing has booms, do not stand under or near these as they may move without warning.
 - Do not try to board or get out of a moving train.
 - When entering an area to observe or photograph trains you must take account of the legality of your actions – ensure that you can legally enter and you are not trespassing in any way. If in doubt ask and get permission from officials for your presence lineside - in any yards, sheds, industrial complex etc., and also for all your photography and video activities where these may be restricted. If you cannot get permission and have any doubts, do not access the area or take photographs.
 - Visits to areas known to be restricted or industrial complexes, should always be arranged in advance.
 - If you smoke, please ensure that you put your cigarettes out properly!
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