

TRAINS PASS RED SIGNALS

At the end of June an investigation began into the second “near miss” on the rail network in nine days. A First Great Eastern service went through a red signal near Ilford and approached a section of track occupied by an on-coming train. Luckily a signaller realised the danger and managed to get a message to both drivers. The signal equipment was tested after the incident and found to be working normally. Railtrack, who are conducting the inquiry with First Great Eastern are looking at “driver error”, since there was no previous history of danger signals being missed at that location. First Great Eastern stress that drivers are stringently monitored and regularly examined.

A similar incident occurred nine days early when a Thames Train service went through a red light just outside Paddington coming to a halt 60 yards from Heathrow Express train on the same line.

These incidents continue the debate on automatic brakes and anti-crash devices which began after the earlier train disasters. Is another accident just around the corner?

BS8800 is the Health & Safety standard and it would be expected that this and other more specific rail safety standards would be rigorously applied (procedures, training, audits, reviews, etc). Who owns the responsibility for Health and Safety? The Health & Safety Executive or the Board of Directors, Management and Staff at Thames Train Services?

COMPUTER FAILURE HITS FLIGHTS

A computer failure at the national air traffic control centre caused severe delays for thousands of passengers. The computer, which generates flight data strips showing altitude and position went down for over an hour. The Air Traffic Controllers had to write out strips manually and this resulted in long queues of aircraft waiting to depart, and lengthy hold ups before landed aircraft could be given a gate for disembarkation. Although only down for about an hour the backlog caused congestion all day and many services were cancelled.

According to aviation managers the air traffic control system is not due for replacement for seven years. The CAA said the software was very reliable and would remain in use after the delayed opening of the new national air traffic centre due in 2002. When this centre goes on-line at Swanwick it is expected to be the most technologically advanced air traffic control centre in the world. The system combines leading-edge technology and techniques with commercial off-the-shelf products. There are 23 subsystems and two million lines of computer code.

MORE PROBLEMS AT SELLAFIELD

Despite being approved to ISO9001 and BS5882 (a Quality Standard specifically approved for the Nuclear Industry) problems continue to arise at the plant.

An acid leak at Sellafield resulted in BNFL being fined again after admitting a safety breach - the sixth in 10 years. After a previous acid leak in 1994, BNFL had pledged that the company would introduce new procedures by the end of 1996. Investigations into the incident in March last year revealed that the procedures had not been fully implemented. The judge concluded that there was a failure to train employees adequately in isolation procedures; a failure to provide a proper system of isolation procedures and a failure to provide a Health and Safety program. BNFL said that they regretted the incident and have already started strengthening the safety organisation at Sellafield and

have begun to improve training for staff.

BNFL also have to pay £40 million compensation to Japan after shipping nuclear fuel rods with falsified safety documents. The quality control data had been falsified during fuel manufacture at the Sellafield plant and when this was revealed in December the Japanese demanded an explanation and the removal of the fuel.

The return of the fuel will be very costly, as shipping it is very complex. The cargo has to be protected by two armed escorts to protect it from possible terrorist seizure and permission is needed from all the nations whose waters the shipment would pass through, and this could take years to arrange.

The operators of Sellafield were trying to look positively at the compensation deal. It hopes the money will renew confidence in its operations and help secure further business with the Japanese.

STATUS OF ISO9000/9001/9004

Draft International Standards (DISs) for the 2000 revisions to the ISO9000 series of quality management standards are expected to be shortly raised to final draft standards (FDISs). Although the USA see weaknesses in a number of the definitions and a lack of consistency, the standards received sufficient approval from other participating member bodies. The FDIS ballots for all three standards is likely to take place between Sept 1 and Nov 1. If balloting is successful, publication of the international standards will take place about 15 November.

ISO19011 AUDITING STANDARD

Committee Draft (CD) of ISO19011, Guidelines on Quality and Environmental Management System Auditing, has been revised following comments received from member bodies of the International Organisation for Standardisation. Unfortunately, the original standard was not very helpful for auditors. It is hoped that the new version will provide better guidance.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR JUNIOR GOAL POSTS

BSI have issued safety guidelines (PAS 36-1:2000) which lay down minimum safety requirements for the 25,000 sites where junior goals are used throughout the country.

In the past ten years, nine children have been killed in Britain by falling crossbars and this guide should help prevent further deaths from happening. It covers seven-a-side and five-a-side goals used in schools and clubs. It provides guidance on strength, stability, anchoring systems, together with basic dimensional requirements and test methods. The guide is backed by the Football Association, the Health and Safety Executive and the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

VACCINE TRIALS

Clearance has been given to trials in Britain for the first Aids vaccine, designed to fight the strain causing a pandemic in Africa. The vaccine was developed by scientists from Oxford University and the University of Nairobi, inspired by studies on Nairobi prostitutes who have been exposed daily to HIV, the Aids virus, yet have not developed the disease.

The first trials, which will take place in Oxford, will involve 18 healthy volunteers who will be given the vaccine to make sure it is safe. They will be given three injections at three weekly intervals. If it passes this stage of safety, it will then go on to further trials. Among those volunteering for the vaccine is Dr. Evan Harris, the Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon. "It is not a case of being brave" he said, "This is a standard safety trial conducted in healthy, low-risk people, to test for adverse effects."

Also recently, researchers from US have reported that a new vaccine to show promise against Alzheimer's, the most common form of senile dementia, has passed an important stage in the human safety trials. This degenerative brain disease affects up to 500,000 people in the UK. Initial results from the first phase of the trial of the vaccine, designed to test for toxicity of the vaccine, showed "no obvious safety concerns". Further safety trials are to be conducted on 100 patients in the US and the UK, although the researchers have reported to say the early results are highly encouraging. However, it would take least two years before they will know whether the vaccine, already shown to be effective in mice, can help Alzheimer sufferers.

QUALITY WINES

Could you tell what does a bottle of Liebfraumilch (cost £3 a bottle) and a bottle of Chateau Pétrus (cost £1,400 a bottle - the world's most expensive wine) have in common, that Penfold's Grange (cost £250 a bottle - Australia's best wine) does not? The answer is quality. Both Chateau Pétrus and Liebfraumilch are officially quality wines within the EU's wine regulations.

The origin of quality wine dates to before the formation of the EEC, when the first national controls were set up by the French, between the two world wars to protect the reputation of the classic wine-growing areas. At that time good wine was in short supply, so many of France's great wines were being 'stretched' with the addition of lesser wines. Efforts to eradicate this fraud led to the introduction of Appellation Contrôlée (AC) a set of rules controlling the production and naming of certain top wines.

Subsequently, all wines made within the EU must be either quality wines produced in a specified region (QWPSR) or merely 'table wine', which are seen as the lowest of the low by the officials. QWPSR guarantees that the wine in the bottle has been made in accordance with local rules and regulations. Most importantly, it guarantees that the wine comes from the area stated on the bottle. What it cannot guarantee is high quality. QWPSR, states the qualities of the wine, not its quality. But in these days with greater wine-making knowledge and technology it is increasingly possible to make drinkable (and frequently high-quality) wines outside the classic regions. The difference between the best and the worst has never been narrower. Areas and countries that could not make good quality wine at the beginning of the twentieth century are now making trophy-winning wines. It is just unfortunate that the European legislators chose to include the word 'quality' in their terminology.

It was reported recently that one of France's leading wine inspectors provoked outrage in the Bordeaux vineyards by rejecting a record number of wines as not being fit to bear the distinguished label. He made a speech criticising sloppy methods and poor quality control, and complaining of a serious decline in the quality of wines that applied for Bordeaux status. More than 15% of applications for the Appellation Contrôlée label were rejected outright.

Plans are to introduce a tougher new system of inspections with rigorous series of checks and quality controls. At present, Bordeaux accounts for about 40% of France's fine wine exports. The sheer size of the Bordeaux wine industry has led to a growth in mass production methods.

DIARY DATES

25-27 September 2000

Environmental Protection 2000
Contact: NSCA 01273 326313

25-26 September 2000

Incineration of Municipal Waste
Contact: University of Leeds 0113 2332494

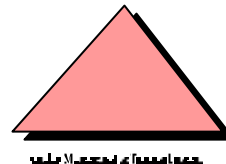
9-10 October 2000

EMS Implementation
Contact: IQA 020 7245 6696

Contacting QM&T

If you would like to learn more about either of the above or any other quality issue, please contact Edda Saunders at the following address:

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Where Quality Counts

27-29 November 2000

EMS Internal Auditor
Contact: IQA 020 7245 6696

TOTAL WORDS 1755

