Rail Delivery Group

National Rail

RDG Guidance Note:
Major Incidents – Preparation of Aide-Mémoires for Senior Managers

RDG-OPS-GN-014
Issue 4 – April 2022

About this document

Explanatory Note

The Rail Delivery Group is not a regulatory body and compliance with Guidance Notes or Approved Codes of Practice is not mandatory; they reflect good practice and are advisory only. Users are recommended to evaluate the guidance against their own arrangements in a structured and systematic way, noting that parts of the guidance may not be appropriate to their operations. It is recommended that this process of evaluation and any subsequent decision to adopt (or not adopt) elements of the guidance should be documented. Compliance with any or all of the contents herein, is entirely at an organisation's own discretion.

Other Guidance Notes or Approved Codes of Practice are available on the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) website.

Executive Summary:

This Guidance Note draws together good practice in provision of aide-mémoires and other prompts for those leading the response to Major Incidents, particularly during the initial response phase.
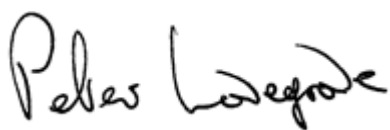
Issue Record

Issues 1 to 3 of this document were published as: RDG-GN014.

Issue	Date	Comments
1	December 2012	Original version as an ATOC document.
2	February 2015	Social media section added (plus minor corrections and revisions)
3	October 2017	Periodic review and also reformatted as an RDG document
4	April 2022	Updated following periodic review and reformatted to comply with latest RDG template.

This document is reviewed on a regular 3 yearly cycle.

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Contents

1 Purpose and scope

1.1 Purpose

The twin starting points for this Guidance Note are i) a recognition that the Managing Director and other Directors taking leading roles in responding to a Major Incident affecting their railway undertaking will find themselves very quickly under unprecedented pressure from many different quarters and hence that ii) some form of reminder will be of benefit as a means of helping to ensure that key issues are not overlooked, in particular during the initial phase of the response.

This document is intended to support the creation of such reminders - action cards, checklists, prompts and other such readily accessible tools - which will henceforth be referred to collectively in this document as aide-mémoires. It is not intended to be used directly by Directors and senior managers themselves but by those, typically within emergency planning, responsible for preparing and providing such aide-mémoires.

It draws together best practice from within the railway undertaking community, specialists in disaster management and other responding agencies to suggest the content of such aide-mémoires, along with options for how they might most effectively be made available. While precise content of these will need to reflect individual company requirements, it is possible to identify a number of common themes and principles and it is on these that this document focuses.

1.2 Scope

The Cabinet Office definition of 'Major Incident', also adopted within the JESIP Definition of Terms Used – Glossary, is "An event or situation, with a range of serious consequences, which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agencies". It should be noted that what constitutes a Major Incident for one responder agency may not do for another.

Rail companies are included within the definition of responder agencies, hence both Network Rail and individual railway undertakings are themselves able to declare a Major Incident. It is recommended that railway undertakings identify who within their organisations should be authorised to make such a declaration and also the criteria for doing so, however this falls outside the scope of this Guidance Note.

It is strongly recommended that a flexible approach to the content of this Guidance Note is adopted. There will be cases where a Major Incident is declared but much of its content may not be relevant. Conversely, elements of its content may be very relevant to incidents which are significant but do not meet the criteria for being declared Major Incidents.

2 Application

2.1 Intention and focus

This Guidance Note is intended to support and complement railway undertaking Emergency Response and Major Incident Plans. It is not intended as a stand-alone document.

Its focus is on helping to meet the needs of the person assuming overall responsibility for the incident response (referred to as the Strategic Commander throughout the remainder of this document). While it is recognised that other Directors and senior managers will also have specific responsibilities in the event of a Major Incident, no attempt is made to address these beyond noting that the Strategic Commander will need to ensure that these responsibilities are being adequately met.

3 Introduction

3.1 Impact of Major Incidents

Major Incidents, particularly those resulting in fatalities or serious injuries to passengers, inevitably result in massive pressure being placed on the railway undertaking concerned. The short-term financial impact will include loss of revenue due to service disruption, repair or replacement of damaged assets, staff sickness, etc. Potentially more significant, reputational damage may lead to longer term loss of confidence in the business on the part of the public, media and politicians. Nor should the impact on staff morale and what may be termed the emotional trauma of the organisation be overlooked.

3.2 Reputation risk

While many of the immediate costs will be unavoidable, there is strong evidence to suggest that the way in which a business reacts to a Major Incident is very important in determining the longer term impact on its reputation. It follows that the initial senior level response is particularly critical.

3.3 Assumptions

This Guidance Note assumes that railway undertakings already have in place fully documented emergency response plans and that these include specific roles and responsibilities for company directors along with the management process to support them. It further assumes that the individuals concerned will be trained, exercised and competent in these roles. However, such training and exercising can never fully prepare someone for the enormous pressures that will be faced in the event of an actual incident.

3.4 Support during the critical phase

The most critical period is likely to be that immediately following first advice of the incident through the initial reaction phase – typically the first one to two hours. It is during this time, typified by confusion and speculation, a minimum of definitive facts and before robust communications and support structures have been put in place, that the organisation will have the least control and in many respects be at its most vulnerable. Yet it could also be on the perceived adequacy of the response it makes during this time that it is most likely to be remembered and hence judged by the media and public at large.

In such circumstances, it is unreasonable to expect the individual charged with managing the overall response either to reliably remember all details contained in the company plan or to find the time to re-familiarise themselves with its content. What may, instead, be helpful at this time is a reminder of key points to remember in times of crisis and a checklist of key actions.

4 Definitions

4.1 Definitions used within this document

Term	Definition in the context of this document
Aide-mémoire	Any tool intended as a prompt or checklist of key principles, objectives and priorities.
JESIP	Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles.
Major Incident	See section 1.2.
Rail Group	Collective term for the DfT's Rail Strategy & Services Group, Rail Infrastructure Group and High Speed Rail Group. In the event of a Major Incident, the majority of interaction will be with those in the first of the above, however the DfT is upskilling those in the other two groups to help out with incident response.
Strategic Commander	The member of the Senior Management Team assuming overall responsibility for the company's response to the incident at any given time.

5 The Strategic Commander role

5.1 Training and competence assessment for role of Strategic Commander

It is vital that those who might be called on to lead the response to Major Incidents on behalf of their organisations are given appropriate training – both initial and on-going – for their role.

They should also be subject to periodic assessments of their continuing competence for the role, undertaken by an appropriate agency.

5.2 Appointment of deputy

One or more deputies should also be appointed to provide cover in the event of the non-availability of the person identified to take on the Strategic Commander role. They should be subject to identical training and competence assessment requirements.

6 Aide-mémoires

6.1 Key requirements of an aide-mémoire

If it is to fulfil its purpose as a reminder of key points to remember in times of crisis and a checklist of key actions, an aide-mémoire must meet the following criteria:

i.   Be readily available/accessible.

ii. Be short and concise.

iii. Provide a single high-level reference, i.e. must be comprehensive and self-contained as far as the purpose for which it is intended is concerned.

Finding the right balance between the second and third of these criteria is key.

6.2   Types of aide-mémoire

Aide-mémoires may take one of broadly three forms:

Visual printed – the most traditional approach and involving carrying a paper, card or plastic medium on which are printed the key points. These have the advantage that they can be carried by the individual and there is no reliance on technology to access them. Disadvantages are that they must be kept small if they are to be truly portable, are liable to get mislaid/overlooked, may become damaged and are relatively inflexible in terms of updating.

Visual electronic – keeping an aide-mémoire on the internet or as a locally held file on a laptop, Smartphone or other personal electronic device has the advantage that more information can be held and information can be updated very easily. In many cases it will also allow the individual to print off the information on demand. Disadvantages are that the individual needs to either have the device, which needs to be functioning, with them or else have access to the internet. However, ~~as the Strategic Commander is likely to be working from the railway undertaking HQ, these are unlikely to be issues~~it should be recognised that an incident resulting in the failure of the organisation's IT systems may result in access to such tools via the internet being denied.

Audio – using the hierarchy of options now readily available through call centre type telephone technology, it is possible to set up structured automated help lines. This approach has been used to support Incident Care Team members (020 7096 2976). It provides a convenient way to provide more detailed information to support that made available by other means as described above. For example, such a helpline could be set up to include more detailed guidance in responding to media questions or a description of the role and functioning of the Strategic Co-ordinating Group. It should be recognised that an incident resulting in the failure of communications networks may result in access to such tools being denied.

6.3   Alignment of aide-mémoire and emergency plan

The aide-mémoire should be consistent with and broadly reflect the content of the Company emergency plan.

7   Major Incidents

7.1   Characteristics of Major Incidents involving serious injury/loss of life

i.   Major rail incidents are political events.

ii.   Senior elected and appointed officials will be involved and will comment.

iii.   The opinions of the public and particularly the family and friends of the victims are the ultimate measure of how successfully the incident was handled.

iv.   Whatever their reaction to the loss event itself, families/the public will not tolerate what they perceive to be a poor response.

v.   In cases where there has been loss of life, there is a need to be particularly alert and sympathetic to different cultural/religious requirements. Perceived insensitivity on the part of the organisation risks major reputation damage.

vi.   Issues will emerge which have the potential to impact on the business at a corporate level.

vii.   There will be a significant impact from social media surrounding the incident.

7.2   Major Incident response - key aims and objectives

The overall objective should be to demonstrate and deliver a response that is:

i.   Compassionate – acting sensitively and in particular expressing regret for what has happened

and for the impact on those involved, their families and friends.

ii. Competent – gaining and maintaining control of the situation.

iii. Confident – but not arrogant.

iv. Credible – being open and honest but without speculating.

with the joint aims of providing all appropriate care and support to those involved, limiting reputational damage and minimising the effects on the rest of the business/returning to 'business as usual' as quickly as possible.

Senior managers should remember that in many cases the rail industry will not be managing the "incident" itself – this is the responsibility of the emergency services – but will be managing the consequences of the incident. These will often be felt over a wide area away from the actual scene of the incident.

7.3 Phase of the response

7.3.1 Evolution of a Major Incident
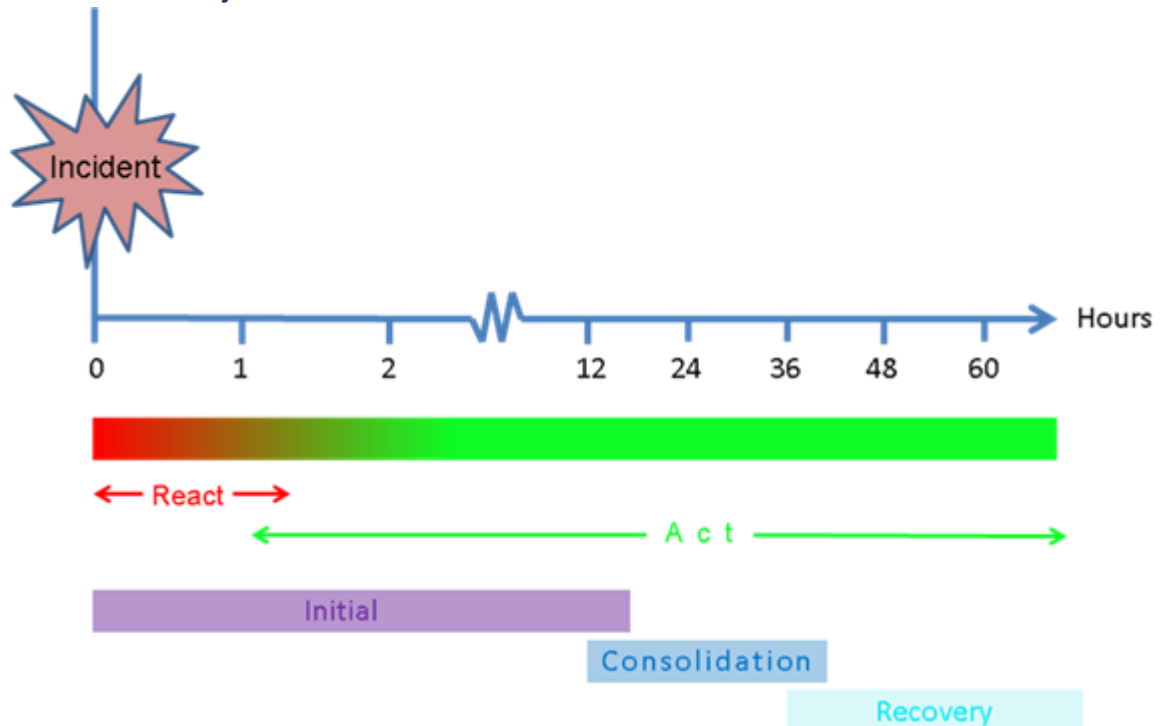
7.3.2 Reactive/proactive response

Inevitably the initial response phase will be a reactive one as details of the nature and severity of the incident emerge. However, the aim should be to gain sufficient control within the first 1 – 2 hours to allow an increasingly proactive approach, as per the diagram above.

7.3.3 Providing current and anticipating future resourcing needs

Similarly, while resources will need to be concentrated on the management of the event itself during the first few hours, in parallel there is also a need to anticipate and provide for requirements that will emerge both over the next 24 hours or so and longer term. In the diagram above these are shown as Initial, Consolidation and Recovery and there will be some overlap between them.

It is important that the Strategic Commander is aware of these various competing priorities and ensures that a balance is kept between them.

7.4 Strategic objectives of the response

The Strategic Commander will need to be conscious of the following strategic objectives and ensure that each is being addressed, either by themselves or by others:

i. Leadership – at site/within the business/publicly visible.

ii. Co-ordination.

iii. Provision of assistance/people issues.

iv. Communication.

v. Continued operation.

vi. Support for investigation.

Each of these is explored in more detail in the following sections.

8 Aide-mémoire contents - Strategic Commander role

8.1 Leadership

8.1.1 Introduction

The Strategic Commander should remain focussed on the strategic level of incident command and not allow themselves to become drawn down into the tactical detail (unless the tactical plan is not meeting the needs of the strategy).

Their focus must be on the WHAT? and WHY? of the response, i.e. WHAT, in broad terms, are we doing to respond to the situation – the 'game plan' – and WHY are we adopting this 'game plan', methodology or approach, rather than another one.

The detail of what is being done to respond (the HOW?) should be left to the tactical level managers.

8.1.2 Actions

The Strategic Commander should either complete the following actions themselves or else satisfy themselves that they have been completed:

i. Ensure the company emergency plan has been activated.

ii. Provide notification of the event to the Managing Director (if not the Strategic Commander), other Directors, HR On Call and parent company, also other key contacts as per the emergency plan.

iii. Establish a senior level Crisis Management Team and confirm its location.

iv. Identify immediate objectives and priorities based on review of circumstances.

v. Identify and anticipate issues.

vi. Identify decisions that need to be taken and when.

vii. Identify where authority for these decisions lies and whether authority needs to be delegated to facilitate a timely response.

viii. Establish roles and priority actions for each Directorate.

ix. Provide strategic advice to company on call personnel and Duty Control Manager.

x.   Consider need for company representation at incident site and/or other key locations (such as major stations).

xi.   Identify and assess the implications for the business at a corporate level and initiate measures to deal with these. This includes considering political, reputational, legal and financial aspects as well as the media strategy.

xii.   Consider the need to call in external resources/advisers such as disaster management and/or reputation management experts and legal support.

8.1.3   Behaviours

The Strategic Commander should adopt the following:

i.   Be strategic – the Strategic Commander should seek to ensure that neither they nor other members of the Crisis Management Team succumb to the temptation to actively involve themselves in providing the detailed response.

ii.   Be positive.

iii.   Be active.

iv.   Be reassuring.

v.   Be apologetic – it is important to say you are sorry (noting that this is not the same as accepting responsibility).

vi.   Be visible, e.g. visit hospitals, emergency assistance centres, staff areas and the incident site as appropriate.

8.1.4   Resources

In larger incidents it may be beneficial to appoint a 'Chief of Staff' to support the Strategic Commander and Crisis Management Team. The role of this individual is to:

i.   Coordinate the activities of the team supporting the Strategic Commander.

ii.   Act a trusted advisor or 'conscience' to the Strategic Commander concerning important decisions.

iii.   Chair teleconferences or meetings, thus allowing the Strategic Commander to concentrate on decision making.

iv.   Act as a 'Gate Keeper' to the Strategic Commander protecting that individual from distractions.

v.   Coordinate the gathering and collation of information in order to enable the Strategic Commander to obtain and maintain 'situational awareness' in order to drive effective decision making.

The role of Chief of Staff requires careful consideration and specific training and experience. Where possible, this person should have extensive incident command experience in their own right and be known and trusted by the Strategic Commander.

8.1.5   Looking ahead to recovery

While clearly the focus during the initial response stage needs to be on the immediate challenges, it is also important to start thinking ahead to the response phase, including what is going to be needed to support this and how it might be resourced.

8.2　Coordination – key tasks

The Strategic Commander should either complete the following themselves or else satisfy themselves that they have been completed:

i.　Confirm notification/activation of key roles.

ii.　Confirm appointment of TOLO/SIO, that they have been assessed as suitable for the role (in light of the scale of the incident) and that resources have been deployed as necessary to assist them.

iii.　Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG - sometimes referred to as the Gold Co-ordinating Group):
- o　Ascertain whether such a group has been established
- o　Obtain contact details
- o　Make contact with rail industry resource on this group (this will usually be provided by Network Rail) or, failing that, the BTP resource.

iv.　Confirm that all statutory bodies have been notified.

v.　Work with stakeholders and partners:
- o　Network Rail
- o　BTP
- o　Local authorities
- o　Hospitals/medical authorities
- o　Other railway undertakings
- o　Voluntary sector (Red Cross, Victim Support, WRVS, etc.)
- o　Faith communities
- o　ORR
- o　DfT
- o　RAIB.

vi.　Finance:
- o　Liaise with insurance companies for response and recovery
- o　If necessary, make arrangements for additional funding to support the response.

vii.　Cooperate with lead agencies re press conferences and media holding areas.

viii.　Set up regular review/update points and/or telephone conferences.

ix.　Liaise with Owning Group, stakeholders and shareholders.

x.　Liaise with leasing companies/train service providers.

8.3　Provision of assistance / people issues

8.3.1　Staff and responders

The Strategic Commander should either complete the following actions themselves or else satisfy themselves that they have been completed:

Appoint and empower a Director/senior manager to assume responsibility for welfare of staff responding to the incident and who will:

i.　Ensure that adequate arrangements are in place and are being worked to in respect of appropriate equipment and clothing, refreshments, rest periods and relief.

ii.　Request support from other railway undertakings as necessary.

iii.　Initiate chain of care procedures as necessary.

iv.　Provide care, support and reassurance for staff involved in the incident, including their families (including protection from the media) – it may be appropriate to involve the Incident Care Team in this (see next section).

     v.   Resource and look after the Crisis Management Team itself.

8.3.2 Passengers and members of the public

A Director/senior manager should be appointed and empowered to direct the company humanitarian response and who will:

i. Ensure that the Incident Care Team has been activated/deployed and that an ICT Deployment Manager has been appointed.

ii. In conjunction with the ICT Deployment Manager, request Incident Care Team support from other railway undertakings as necessary.

iii. In conjunction with the ICT Deployment Manager, request Incident Care Team support from Kenyon[1] as necessary.

iv. Initiate emergency finance.

v. Initiate chain of care procedures as necessary.

vi. Liaise/agree with other responders (local authorities, police, hospitals) regarding joint strategy for provision of humanitarian assistance to those affected.

8.4 Communication – key tasks

The Strategic Commander should either complete the following actions themselves or else satisfy themselves that they have been completed:

For social media please see Section 16.

i. Provide a single point of contact between the Crisis Management Team and Control.

ii. Confirm that effective communication between site (including TOLO) and the Crisis Management Team has been established – this may be through the Strategic Command structure.

iii. Provide a focus of peer group (i.e. senior level) communication within the industry/parent company, with Network Rail, other railway undertakings, BTP/local police force, legal advisors, etc. and liaise/agree with them the initial line to take.

iv. Agree media response and who will lead, including initial holding statement.

v. Appoint a Director/senior manager to be available to front the media response.

vi. Ensure that press officers are available, including at incident site if appropriate.

vii. Release initial press statement.

viii. Establish who is scheduling the first press conference and assist/support as necessary.

ix. Cease inappropriate advertising (TV, radio, cinema, press, on-line, etc.).

x. Start active monitoring of media and develop strategy for input and response.

xi. Establish who is setting-up a media call centre and assist/support as necessary.

xii. Update company website to acknowledge and express regret for the incident and remove other material that may be inappropriate under the circumstances. Request National Rail website to be similarly updated.

xiii. Establish a secure website or websites to facilitate communication with staff responders, staff more generally and those passengers/members of the public involved.

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[1] Or alternative supplier. As of the date of issue of this Guidance Note this external support is provided by Kenyon

xiv. Address families/friends, media and employees.

xv. Ensure a suitable internal communication strategy is set up with the HR Director to reassure staff.

xvi. Issue briefings (separately as appropriate to media, staff, government, corporate level) covering:
- o Situation – where are we now?
- o Mission – where do we want to be?
- o Execution – how are we going to achieve this?
- o Service & Support – what resources and personnel do we have/need?
- o Command & Communications – who is in charge and what communications do we have?

8.5 Liaising and working with the Department for Transport[2]

8.5.1 Introduction

Most emergencies in the United Kingdom are handled at a local level by the emergency services and by the appropriate local authority or authorities, with no direct involvement by Central Government.

However, where the scale or complexity of an incident is such that some degree of Central Government co-ordination or support becomes necessary, a designated Lead Government Department (LGD) will be made responsible for the overall management of that Central Government involvement.

As a result, the Department for Transport, and the part of it responsible for rail, i.e. Rail Group, will have an interest in any emergency with a significant impact on the railway.

8.5.2 Role of Rail Group in the event of a major rail incident

Rail Group's role is broadly two-fold:

i. To support the railway in managing the incident and mitigating its effects on passengers and freight in a timely and effective manner.

ii. To support DfT and other Ministers by providing clear prompt and well-informed advice to inform their decision-making and communications on the issues affecting the railway.

A number of teams in Rail Group are likely to be involved depending on the type of event, and Rail Group will need to support and co-ordinate its efforts between them and industry.

The Land Transport National Security team will be the main interface with railway undertakings, Network Rail and the BTP for security incidents, whereas in civil emergencies and the recovery phase, the ~~Performance~~Train Services & Operations ~~and Resilience~~ team will lead.

Railway undertakings can also expect to be contacted by their ~~franchise~~ contract team within the Department as often this is where the closest links lie between the Department and the operator.

Rail Group provides a critical interface between the industry and Ministers and as a result effective management of communications between the rail industry and Rail Group is imperative.

8.5.3 Liaison with Rail Group during a Major Incident

A Director/senior manager should be appointed to take overall responsibility for engaging with Rail Group.

8.6 Social media

8.6.1 The nature of social media

Social media is a not only a key communication medium but also a primary influence on how individuals react to and form opinions about any particular situation or event.

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[2] This section describes the situation in England. In the event of an incident occurring in Scotland or Wales, Transport Scotland and Transport for Wales respectively can be expected to become similarly involved.

It follows that it is essential for railway undertakings to engage with social media during Major Incidents and their aftermath and they should have mechanism and resources in place to achieve this.

It does, however, need to be recognised from the outset that by its very nature, social media cannot be controlled and any attempt to do so will be at best futile and at worst serve to discredit the company.

8.6.2 Social media reaction

There should be no doubt that a Major Incident will generate an overwhelming volume of social media messages. Useful pieces of information will be chaotically mixed with very large amounts of irrelevant and misleading material. However, properly understood, such messages have the potential to inform how an organisation responds. The messages can provide critical information about what is happening on the ground along with the public and political reaction and can also be used to respond to and help those affected. The success or otherwise of the organisation in managing and responding appropriately to social media is likely to be reflected in and increasingly determine the longer term impact on company reputation.

8.6.3 Key tasks

The following are recommended as a starting point for what the Strategic Commander should either complete themselves or else satisfy themselves that they have been completed:

i. Start active monitoring of social media and develop strategy for input and response.

ii. Issue appropriate messages through existing social media channels (firstly Twitter and then others such as Facebook).

iii. All staff should be reminded of the following basic principles when using social media, either privately/individually or on behalf of the company:
   o Breach of trust/confidence – information, including personal data, that comes into the possession of the company should be treated as confidential and not divulged publicly or to other parties without legitimate reason
   o Bringing discredit to the company – staff should be mindful that even seemingly trivial comments about the company, management or colleagues have the potential to 'go viral' and become a focus of negative public and media focus
   o Revealing information about internal company processes and practices – information pertaining to company operational, safety management, HR, commercial and similar arrangements should be treated as confidential and not divulged publicly or to other parties without legitimate reason.

iv. All staff should be reminded that any information placed on the Internet or social media could potentially end up in the worldwide public domain and be seen or used by someone for whom it was not intended. It is likely that any information placed on the Internet or social media will be considered to be a public disclosure.

v. In support of the above, all staff should be advised to avoid initiating or responding to social media messages when off duty after consuming alcohol or otherwise when their judgement may be impaired.

8.7 Continued operation - key tasks

The Strategic Commander should either complete the following actions themselves or else satisfy themselves that they have been completed:

i. Ensure a Director is appointed to focus on the continuing operation of the rest of the business (and not on the incident).

ii. Monitor and address emerging staff concerns.

iii. Review marketing material, advertising campaigns, etc. and revise as necessary.

iv. Protect other staff from getting drawn into the incident, either directly or through requests for information.

8.8 Understanding of and support for investigations – key tasks

The Strategic Commander should either complete the following actions themselves or else satisfy themselves that they have been completed:

i.   Understand the roles and likely activities of the ORR, RAIB and BTP with regard to the incident, its investigation and follow up.

ii. Quickly identify the parts of the business likely to be exposed to an investigation and secure copies of records for staff/vehicles involved.

iii. Ensure an evidence co-ordinator is appointed and related evidence is being gathered (on and off site) and secured, including:
   o   Maintenance records of the train(s) involved
   o   Traincrew records (also any other staff who may be directly implicated)
   o   Voice recordings
   o   OTMR recordings.

iv. Arrange for copies of any documents given to the Police, RAIB, etc. to be made prior to handing them over.

v.   Liaise with RAIB.

8.9 Record keeping and logging – key tasks

The Strategic Commander should appoint one or more competent individuals to the role of record keeper (loggist) - or else satisfy themselves that such an individual or individuals has/have been appointed.

The loggist should be tasked with ensuring that a record of all key decisions taken (or not taken), including the rationale behind the decision making process, is kept.

Key individuals, particularly those exercising command authority, should also maintain their own personal log. This should be checked and correlate with the main record kept by the Loggist.

Further details of the loggist role and requirements may be found in RDG Guidance Note RDG-OPS-GN-034 – Logging and Loggists.

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