Risks

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Table of contents

Railway accident **3**

Railway accident

Threat assessment: Given that between 6 and 24 railway accidents have occurred annually over the past ten years, the occurrence of a more serious railway accident is considered likely. Compared to the previous assessment, the risk level has not changed.

Most railway accidents take place at level crossings and pedestrian crossings. Railway users are required to give way to trains and must ensure it is safe before crossing the tracks. Unfortunately, fatal accidents occur every year. Over the past decade, the number of accidents has ranged from 6 to 24 annually (excluding suicides). The causes of such accidents may include carelessness, the use of headphones, distraction by mobile phones, as well as being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Railway accidents are categorised as either serious accidents or accidents.

- A serious accident is a train collision or derailment that results in at least one fatality, serious injury to at least five people, or causes serious damage to rolling stock, railway infrastructure, or the environment.

- An accident is an unplanned or unexpected event, or a chain of events, such as a train colliding with another train or shunting rolling stock, a train striking an obstacle, a derailment, a collision at a level crossing, a person being struck by rolling stock, a fire involving rolling stock, and other such incidents resulting in damage.

THREATS

- Planned increases in train speeds to up to 160 km/h may lead to a rise in the number of accidents and an increase in their severity. In recent years, the number of train passengers has steadily grown. Faster train speeds will provide quicker connections between destinations, which could further accelerate passenger growth. Variations in freight volumes may also affect the overall level of safety.

- Adverse weather conditions may act as a contributing factor. Heavy snowfall, torrential rain, and fog can significantly reduce visibility at crossings. This is particularly dangerous at crossings regulated only by traffic signs. Furthermore, during snowstorms, crossings may not be cleared of snow as required, creating the risk that cars attempting to cross the tracks could become stuck.

- Rail transport is used to carry large quantities of chemicals. In the event of an accident, this would greatly increase the severity of the consequences.

- The greatest danger lies in the fact that, under a combination of unfavourable circumstances, a railway accident could become a very serious and high-casualty event. In addition, environmental pollution and/or material damage could result. There is also the risk that a serious accident could occur in a location that requires the use of special equipment to reach those in need of assistance–for example, in forests, fields, bogs, or other areas lacking infrastructure apart from the railway itself. In such cases, providing help would be significantly more difficult.

ACTIONS

- To mitigate the risks arising from higher train speeds, the regulations concerning the requirements for level crossings have been updated, and railway infrastructure managers have begun implementing these new requirements. As a result, more grade-separated crossings are being created, and many existing crossings are being upgraded with additional barriers and automatic signal lights.

- In order to minimise the consequences in the event of an accident, railway accident exercises are carried out.

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