

Report 02/2018: Child nearly falling through a missing toilet floor, South Devon Railway

On publication of RAIB's report concerning a child nearly falling through a missing toilet floor, South Devon Railway, Simon French, Chief Inspector of Rail Accidents said:

"Britain's heritage railways carry over 9 million passengers every year. People are travelling for pleasure, and they don't expect any nasty surprises during their journey. When a mother, enjoying a happy day out with a small child, is suddenly faced with a life-threatening hazard, it is important to find out what went wrong. A door opened - and she had to grab hold of her little boy to stop him falling through a gaping hole in the floor of the carriage.

"Operating even a small railway involves dealing with significant risks. Carriages built sixty or more years ago need looking after to keep them both clean and welcoming, and safe for passengers to ride in. Maintenance involves inspecting the condition of the vehicle, including the hidden parts that are hard to get at, at regular, appropriate intervals. It needs to be properly planned, and backed up with prompt action when something needs fixing.

"In this case, the railway company took out the toilet floor, to get at and fix a leaking brake pipe. The engineers found a lot of previously undetected rust and rot, that was going to have to be dealt with. It seemed like a good idea to seal up the toilet door until the whole carriage could be got into the workshops for overhaul, but that was not easy to do securely, and the door came open.

"Our investigation found that the railway's safety management system was not operating properly, and had not been reviewed for many years. A flawed management structure contributed to poor decision-making. Staff were expected to do jobs which they were not really qualified for. We have recommended an independent review of how the railway manages the safety of its operations. I hope that the rest of the Heritage Railway sector will also look carefully at this report, and take action to make sure that the same thing cannot happen on their railways".

Newsdate: 30 January 2018