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Life-saving campaign launched as new figures reveal one teenager risks their life on railway tracks every four hours

Alarming new figures reveal more than a quarter of teenagers (27%) confess to behaving in a way that could endanger their life on the railway. One in 10 teenagers admitted to walking along the railway line - more than two fifths of those (42%) in the last year¹.

The number of young people taking risks on the railway track has gone up by almost 80 per cent in the last five years². In the last 12 months alone, seven young people under the age of 18 have lost their lives and a further 48 people have received life changing injuries.

As a result the rail industry and the British Transport Police have launched a new campaign - called 'You Vs Train', which targets teenagers to make them face the serious and devastating consequences for them and their loved ones when they make the potentially life-changing decision to ignore warnings and go onto the railway, with its obvious and hidden dangers.

At the heart of the You Vs Train campaign is the story of Tom Hubbard – a young boy who suffered life-changing injuries in 2014 when he was electrocuted by the overhead power cables. Tom suffered third degree burns across 57% of his body and he has been left to deal with the serious physical and psychological consequences ever since.

Tom explains: "I woke up 11 days later in the burns unit at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital wrapped from head to toe in bandages, heavily medicated and unable to string a sentence together. I don't think I knew what was real and what wasn't. When the doctors and my mum came to speak to me a few days later, the enormity of what had happened finally hit me. They explained how lucky I was to be alive, but it was going to be a long road to recovery.

"Four years on I'm still affected by the events of that day and every time I look in the mirror I'm reminded by that one decision to go on the railway. The accident has made me more of an introvert and cautious of trying new things, often opting to stay in during the day to avoid people and wear hoodies and long-sleeved tops to hide my scars, even on hot days"

The lack of knowledge about the potential dangers seems to be why children choose the tracks as a good place to take risks³, with only a third (37%) believing that the railway is extremely dangerous.

- Just under a third (31%) don't believe that severe burns as a result of electrocution or electrocution by the overhead wires (31%) are risks you might face if you go on the railway tracks
- 15% think that it's safe to walk on the railway track if you check a timetable to make sure there are no trains coming
- Almost a fifth (17%) think that getting a dropped/lost item (e.g. phone or football) from the railway track is relatively safe as long as you leave again straight away

The new data also highlights some worrying seasonal peaks in the number of incidents, with the summer holidays seeing more than double the number of young risk takers, compared to the winter months⁴.

Allan Spence, head of public and passenger safety at Network Rail, explains: “Hundreds of people each year unintentionally take on the railway and lose. This year we have already seen a record number of young people losing their life or being injured on the track.

“The railway is full of both obvious and hidden dangers. The electricity on the railway is always on and always dangerous. Trains can also travel up to 125 miles per hour, so even if a driver can see your child, they can’t stop in time and they can’t change direction. Parents - please help us keep your children safe by educating them about what they take on when they step on the track.”

A short film reenacting Tom’s story will be launched across social media and shown in cinemas throughout the summer. Tom’s family will also feature in the campaign to show how Tom’s accident has impacted them.

BTP Assistant Chief Constable Robin Smith said: “We hope that by sharing Tom’s story, young people who might have previously considered trespassing on the railways will think twice.

“We want his story to be heard – the tracks are not a playground. They’re incredibly dangerous and, as Tom’s story shows, can easily result in serious injury or worse.

“We hope the campaign will help young people to understand the risks, and help them to make the right decision and stay away from railway lines. Equally, it will also help them understand that bad decisions don’t just affect them, but they will have a deep and lasting impact on their families and friends as well. This campaign is not just for our young people but also their friends and family.”

The rail industry is also working together to roll out a new schools engagement programme, where community engagement managers from across Network Rail, British Transport Police (BTP) and Train Operating Companies will be out teaching thousands of children about railway safety. BTP officers will also be stepping-up patrols across the country.

To watch Tom’s video and find out how to keep your children safe on the railway this summer visit: www.YouVsTrain.co.uk

Ends

Interviews, imagery and video footage available on request.

Notes to editors

- More than a quarter (28%) don’t realise that physical injury from being hit by a train is a risk they would face if they walk on the railway track
- More than half (54%) don’t think that the sidings (low speed track running alongside the main line) are dangerous

- A fifth (20%) don't think that the main line/tracks of a railway are dangerous
 - A fifth (20%) don't think that the overhead cables on a railway are dangerous
 - Almost a fifth (18%) think that there is no risk of being electrocuted unless you touch the main rail track or overhead power cable
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1. Survey of 750 males and 250 females, aged 13-18, conducted by 3GEM Research and Insights in June-July 2018 on behalf of Pegasus, Network Rail and British Transport Police.
 2. National Fusion Unit data June 2018
 3. Survey of 750 males and 250 females, aged 13-18, conducted by 3GEM Research and Insights in June-July 2018 on behalf of Pegasus, Network Rail and British Transport Police.
 4. RSSB data on trespass rates 2015/16