International Union of Railways (UIC) issues yearly report 2018 on Railway accidents in Europe

Number of accidents stabilises; UIC Safety Index shows improvement

(Paris, 19 November 2018) The International Union of Railways (UIC) has published its annual report on railway accidents in Europe. UIC’s safety database has been collecting data since 2001 and currently covers 24 UIC members in Europe and the Middle East. The database is managed by UIC’s Safety Unit. As well as serving as a depository for statistical information on accidents, it also offers a comprehensive insight into the causes, circumstances and consequences of accidents and aligns with the classifications and definitions used in European regulations.

Rail transport is the safest mode of land transport and is improving continuously in terms of safety. Accidents and numbers of victims reduced by almost 20% between 2012 and 2017 thanks to the efforts of the rail community to improve safety in the sector. With a total of 1,785 significant accidents, 2017 saw an improvement of 3% compared to 2016 and is just slightly behind the year with the lowest number of accidents observed - 1,780 in 2015.

Causes of accidents in 2017

51% of accidents were caused by trespassing on railway infrastructure, and 24% were caused by accidents at level crossings. 5% of accidents involved people being hit on a platform or falling from a train or platform. Only 16% of the significant accidents recorded in UIC’s safety database were attributed to internal causes relating to technical or organisational failures or human factors within the rail operation system; the remaining 3% were caused by weather and environmental conditions.
The railway system is particularly vulnerable to the behaviour of people outside of the system: third parties represented 95% of the 972 fatalities recorded in 2017. It is imperative that public authorities play their part in promoting education and raising awareness of risk and continue their efforts to protect the railways from uncivil behaviour by third parties, just as they have done for the road transport sector for many years.

Collisions between trains and derailments

There was a 33% decrease in the number of collisions between trains between 2012 and 2016, and the number of derailments was halved. There were increases in both categories in 2017, but the overall figures remained in the lower range for the period. The 124 accidents recorded resulted in ten fatalities and 72 cases of serious injury. While two accidents accounted for more than half of the victims, it should be noted that there were no victims in 104 of the accidents, i.e. 84% of collisions and derailments.
UIC Global Safety Index

UIC’s Global Safety Index (GSI) not only provides statistics on numbers of accidents; each accident is weighted according to cause, type, frequency and victim category. This approach enables deeper insight into general safety levels, which are considered separately from rare, high-impact events.

Although accident numbers levelled out between 2015 and 2017, the GSI continued to decrease slightly, indicating continuous improvement in rail transport safety levels in Europe and the Middle East.
Members of UIC’s safety database

ADIF (Spain), ADIF-AV (Spain), CFL (Luxembourg), CFR-SA (Romania), CIE (Ireland), DB AG (Germany), Eurotunnel (France and UK), HZ (Croatia), Network Rail (UK), Infrabel (Belgium), IP (Portugal), BANE NOR SF (Norway), MAV (Hungary), ÖBB (Austria), PKP (Poland), ProRail (Netherlands), RAI (Iran), SNCF Réseau (France), FS RFI (Italy), SBB CFF FFS (Switzerland), SZ (Slovenia), SZDC (Czech Republic), TCDD (Turkey), Trafikverket (Sweden), ZSR (Slovakia)

Access the document

The UIC 2018 report on safety can be downloaded from: http://safetydb.uic.org

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