

Office of Rail Transport

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Big problem of small carriers: train drivers do not know the route

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The Office of Rail Transport conducted an inquiry into freight carriers' compliance with safety requirements. One of the areas of the inquiry was whether the train drivers know the route they are going to operate on. Irregularities were found especially among the smaller carriers. Out of seven audited operators only one complied fully with these requirements. Due to the high number of breaches of safety rules, the proceedings to revoke a safety certificate were initiated against one of the carriers. Without a safety certificate it is not possible to run trains on the railway network.

The Office of Rail Transport carried out supervisory activities among freight operators. This time the inquiry was conducted among freight carriers with a relatively small market share. During the inquiry particular emphasis was placed on one of the key safety requirements – drivers' knowledge of the railway routes on which they operate. In Poland main routes of the network are for mixed traffic – it means that the freight trains run on the same infrastructure as passenger trains. That's why freight operators which operate on mixed traffic routes should comply with safety requirements to utmost degree. Routes on which small freight carriers operate are mainly reserved ad hoc, thus freight activity on the network is highly irregular. The probability of encountering a train with a driver who has not acquired or lost knowledge of a given section of the railway line is, unfortunately, high.

- The issue whether the train driver knows the route or not is crucial for the safety of rail transport. The consequences of a lack of a proper supervision over this aspect railway safety of one carrier may adversely affect other carriers and other areas of the railway system - emphasizes Ignacy Góra, the President of the Office of Rail Transport.

The regulations in force state that train drivers should be familiar with the sections of the railway lines on which they operate. During the inquiries carried so far by the Office of Rail Transport it often turned out that carriers did not supervise this area of their activities sufficiently. The initial findings were confirmed by subsequent inspections which were carried

since September 2020. Out of seven audited freight operators, only one complied fully with binding safety regulations. The post-audit conclusions were that the freight carriers' supervision activities in this aspect were deemed insufficient. Moreover, there were cases when an operator deliberately sent a driver with no knowledge of a route.

As a result of these inquiries, the administrative proceedings against freight operators which allowed employees without required qualifications to perform activities related to the operation and safety of railway traffic have been initiated. The freight operators are bound to remedy the situation or pay fines. The courts were also informed about the infringements.

In a case of one of the audited freight carriers, the scope of infringements was sufficient reason to initiate administrative proceedings to withdraw the safety certificate. Moreover, the findings regarding non-compliance of this carrier with train drivers' time of work rules were submitted to the National Labor Inspectorate.

Due to the gravity of the infringements, the inspections and audits will be carried on in order to verify whether the supervision of the freight operators over drivers' knowledge of the railway routes is sufficient and to eliminate such breaches of safety rules.