

Prohibiting use of brush cutters fitted with a 'Metal star blade' for brush cutting works

Issued to: **All Network Rail line managers, safety professionals and RISQS registered contractors**

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Location: Newgate Street, Hertfordshire (LNE/EM)

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Figure 1 - Stihl brush cutter with shredder blade and correct protective guard fitted.

Overview

On 2 July 2016, an operative was using a metal star blade for brush cutting at the Newgate Street access point. This resulted in a piece of metal shard piercing the inner right thigh of the operator. A safety bulletin was subsequently issued (NRB 16/13), and a root cause investigation launched.

Since the Newgate Street incident, two additional events involving metal star blades have occurred.

Both incidents involved a metal object hidden in the undergrowth being struck and a shard of metal being ejected.

This Safety Advice supersedes the earlier version NRA 16/10 Update 1 dated 08/01/18. The significant change is to prohibit the use of metal star blades for brush cutting and replace these with an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) approved shredder blade.

Immediate action required

Metal star blades must be replaced with OEM approved 'Shredder' blades for brush cutting operations. Metal star blades must never be used for brush cutting.

Nylon line or plastic blades are safer options than a metal star blade for strimming. If these cannot be used, metal star blades are permitted, but only for grass strimming.

- The tool and equipment supplier/maintainer must ensure that the brush cutter protective guard is undamaged/untampered and correctly fitted (See Figure 1). Brush cutters with defective blades must be quarantined until repaired.
 - All operators carrying out de-vegetation works must possess the required level of training and competency.
 - Use of brush cutters for de-vegetation must be considered during the task planning process as a "right handed" operation which offers the optimum protection to the operator.
- Operators should work their way down into the vegetation in layers enabling the operator to identify 'hidden' items inside the foliage that may not have been visible during the original site survey.
 - Specialist PPE is required in addition to the standard PPE set out in the Task Risk Control Sheet (NR/L3/MTC/0003/SP021) to ensure adequate protection for all parts of the body. Specialist PPE made available in the Network Rail catalogue includes:
 1. Item 500348, Hi vis Vulture ballistic trouser, orange.
 2. Item 801070, Hi vis Breatheflex jacket, orange
 - The exclusion zone for strimming and brush cutting operations is 15 metres.
 - The team leader/supervisor shall be responsible for ensuring the exclusion zone is enforced both within and outside of the boundary.