

# Frequently asked questions

## ***National Standard for Health Assessment of Rail Safety Workers*** ***November 2016***

### **Q. Why is the Standard being updated?**

As part of its reform maintenance program, the NTC led a review of the Standard to ensure it reflects current medical best practice and meets the practical needs of rail operators and rail safety workers. This will continue to improve rail safety outcomes by ensuring rail workers are medically fit for duty.

### **Q. What is the purpose of the Standard?**

Under the Rail Safety National Law, and as part of an integrated safety management system, rail transport operators are required to manage the risks to safety posed by the ill health of rail safety workers. The Standard provides practical guidance for rail transport operators to meet these obligations.

### **Q. Who uses the Standard?**

The Standard provides guidance to rail operators on how to monitor the health of rail safety workers and applies to all government, commercial, tourist and heritage rail operators.

It also contains medical criteria used by Authorised Health Professionals who are appointed by rail transport operators to perform health assessments of rail safety workers.

### **Q. Is the Standard compulsory?**

Under the Rail Safety National Law which came into effect in January 2013, rail transport operators must have a health and fitness program for rail safety workers that complies with the Standard.

### **Q. When will the revised Standard come into effect?**

The revised Standard will come into effect on 1 February 2017.

### **Q. What are the key changes to the Standard resulting from the review?**

#### ***Latest medical knowledge and best practice***

The revised Standard draws on recent research and expert opinion on the impact that various chronic medical conditions have on fitness for rail safety work.

#### ***Alignment with Assessing Fitness to Drive (AFTD) standards***

This project is critically linked to the latest review of *Assessing Fitness to Drive*, which came into effect on 1 October 2016. Information from the updated medical standards contained in AFTD has been adapted where relevant and applied to the rail environment.

The new edition also features:

- improved guidance on the purpose and intent of triggered health assessments
- flowcharts to support decision-making and fairer management of rail safety workers for seizures and substance misuse
- additional information about the relationship between Authorised Health Professionals and General Practitioners
- more guidance on diabetes screening to reduce unnecessary testing of workers
- improved definitions of visual fields loss to help health professionals in their decision-making process.

### **Q. Who has been involved in reviewing the Standard?**

The NTC received valuable feedback from a wide range of stakeholders including medical and other health professionals, consumer health groups, industry groups and associations, government transport departments, rail transport operators and their employees, unions, and regulators. To assist with interpreting complex medical information, the NTC appointed *Project Health* as medical consultants to the project.

The NTC and Project Health explored feedback received by:

- further liaising with stakeholders, including health professional organisations, to better understand issues and ensure that the medical standards meet current best practice
- considering coroners' reports, various accident investigations and recent research
- bringing together a range of stakeholders in the project reference group, including medical professionals, regulators, rail operators, unions and peak industry bodies, to obtain overarching advice for the review.

A draft revised Standard was released for public comment in June 2016 before the final documents were approved by the Standing Council on Transport and Infrastructure, comprising state and territory transport, planning and infrastructure ministers in November 2016.

### **Q. How do you define a rail safety worker?**

Rail safety workers are defined in the Standard as a worker undertaking rail safety work as described in relevant rail legislation. This can include an employee, contractor, subcontractor or volunteer performing work on a railway or tramway system.

More information about the definition of a rail safety worker can be found in the glossary section of the Standard, available on the [NTC website](#).

### **Q. What types of rail safety workers need to be assessed under the Standard?**

The Standard guides operators to perform a 'risk assessment' of the impact of a rail safety workers' tasks on the safety of the rail network, other workers and the public.

Based on this assessment, workers are categorised according to the potential risks to safety associated with ill health, and health assessments are scheduled accordingly.

### **Category 1: Safety critical work/workers**

Category 1 workers are the highest level of safety critical worker who require high levels of attentiveness to their task and for whom sudden incapacity or collapse (e.g. from a heart attack or blackout) may result in a serious incident affecting the public or the rail network. Driving a single-operator train on the commercial network is an example of a Category 1 task.

### **Category 2: Safety critical work/workers**

The work of Category 2 workers also requires high levels of attentiveness, however fail-safe mechanisms or the nature of their duties ensure sudden incapacity or collapse does not affect safety of the rail network. For example, in many cases signallers are classified as Category 2 because fail-safe signal control systems protect the safety of the network in the case of worker incapacity.

### **Category 3: Non-safety critical worker**

Around the Track Personnel (ATTP) who operate in an environment where they may be at risk from moving rolling stock are classed as Category 3. They are required to have health assessments to identify relevant health risks.

### **Category 4: Non-safety critical worker**

ATTP who do not work around the track, are not at risk from moving rolling stock and are not required to have health assessments under this Standard are classified as Category 4. ATTP who operate in a Controlled Environment are also classified as Category 4.

A Controlled Environment is defined in the Standard as a rail workplace such as a siding, rail yard or workshop environment where a risk assessment has been performed to identify hazards and where controls are implemented to ensure that any person working in, or transiting the area is at minimal risk from moving rolling stock.

### **Q. How often do rail safety workers have to be assessed?**

For workers defined as Category 1, 2 or 3, health assessments are performed during the recruitment process. After that, assessments are scheduled according to the worker's category and age.

#### ***Category 1 and 2: Workers defined as 'safety critical'***

At the time of commencing employment, then:

- every 5 years to age 50, then
- every 2 years to age 60, then
- every year.

#### ***Category 3: Around the Track Personnel in an Uncontrolled Environment***

*(Workers who undertake duties around the railway track in areas where they are at risk of exposure to moving rolling stock)*

At the time of commencing employment, then:

- at 40 years of age, then
- every 5 years.

In any case, Category 1 and 2 workers must have a health assessment conducted within 2 years after reaching 50 years of age, and within one year after reaching 60 years of age.

Health assessments may also be triggered at any time by incidents or concerns regarding the worker's ability to perform their job safely.

## **Q. What type of health conditions might affect a rail safety worker's ability to work safely?**

Rail safety work can involve tasks which, through action or inaction on the part of the worker, could lead directly to a serious incident affecting the public or the rail network.

The rail transport operator has a legal responsibility under the relevant rail safety legislation to ensure systems are in place to protect the safety of the public and the network. This includes a responsibility to ensure the health and fitness of workers is monitored and does not jeopardise rail safety.

Rail safety work can involve complex tasks requiring perception, good judgment, responsiveness and reasonable physical capability. A range of medical conditions, as well as treatments, may therefore impair fitness to work.

Common examples include:

- Blackouts
- Cardiovascular conditions
- Diabetes
- Dementia and cognitive impairment
- Seizures and epilepsy
- Other neurological conditions
- Musculoskeletal conditions
- Psychiatric conditions
- Sleep disorders
- Alcohol and other substance misuse
- Vision and eye disorders.

## **Q. What are the legal and ethical responsibilities of health professionals, rail safety workers and employers?**

The Standard clearly outlines the responsibilities of rail operators, medical professionals and rail safety workers.

**The rail transport operator** has a legal responsibility under the relevant rail safety legislation to ensure systems are in place to protect the safety of the public and the network. This includes ensuring the health and fitness of workers is monitored and does not jeopardise rail safety.

**Rail safety workers** have a duty of care to themselves and others. Once employed, they should understand the implications of their role on the safety of the public and network, and the importance of their health and fitness to rail safety.

They have a responsibility to notify the employer of any temporary or ongoing health condition or change in health status that is likely to affect their ability to perform their work safely. They must also provide complete and accurate information concerning their medical history to the assessing Authorised Health Professional, as well as comply with any review requirements of a health assessment.

**Health professionals** appointed and authorised by the rail transport operator to conduct health assessments for rail safety work should demonstrate they have relevant knowledge and understanding of the rail environment, the associated risks and the requirements of the Standard. The Standard outlines the knowledge and experience necessary to conduct worker assessments.

Authorised Health Professionals should conduct health assessments in line with the procedures contained in the Standard.

The relationship between the health professional and the worker/patient is governed by the ethics of the relevant health profession and by privacy laws.

**Q. How will the revised Standard affect health professionals' practice?**

Rail safety worker health assessments are performed by Authorised Health Professionals who are selected by a rail transport operator on the basis of their compliance with the specified selection criteria outlined in the Standard.

The clarity of the revised Standard facilitates assessment of fitness to work by Authorised Health Professionals and ensures greater consistency in such assessments. It is not anticipated that the revised Standard will impact on health professionals' workload in undertaking assessments.

**Q. How will the revised Standard affect rail operators?**

The revised Standard will allow operators to manage the health of their workers with the latest medical knowledge and best practice. Most changes made in the revised Standard provide greater clarity to improve decision-making by health professionals and to support consistent and fairer management of rail safety workers.

**Q. How will the revised Standard affect rail safety workers?**

The revised Standard reflects developments in medical science and improvements in diagnosis and treatment of various health conditions. It therefore provides scope for workers with well-managed health conditions to continue to work safely.

**Q. Who will receive a hard copy of the revised Standard?**

Organisations who require a printed copy of the Standard can purchase one through the NTC website.

An electronic version is also available to download from the [NTC website](#).

**Q. Where can I find out more information?**

For further information or to download a copy of the Standard, visit the [NTC website](#).