Reducing suicides at railway stations

Each railway suicide is an individual tragedy, but it can also be a cause of trauma amongst employees who witness the event or deal with the aftermath of the incident, including removing the body. Train drivers may be particularly prone to trauma, which can be exacerbated if they have to wait alone before help arrives, or are later made to re-live their experience at an inquest.
Each railway suicide is an individual tragedy

Scale of the problem

- The Rail Safety and Standards Board estimates the total cost of suicides (trackside and at stations) to the industry in 2003 was more than £11M, @ £61,000 per suicide. This includes delay to trains, lost working time as a result of trauma suffered by staff and the equivalent value of trauma as a minor injury.

- The Rail Safety and Standards Board reports that there are approximately 70 incidents of suicide at stations every year (RSSB – 2005 Annual Safety Performance Report). However, there is some debate on this number and many train operating companies have reported that the actual number may be higher.

- The British Transport Police aim to reopen a line within 90 minutes of receiving an incident report.

- Between 1st and 20th March 06 the average impact of a suicide was 77 trains affected resulting in 1489 delay minutes (NR Daily Incident Logs)

Impact of suicides – 01 March 2006-20 March 2006
What can be done?

**Signs and posters**

**Evidence** — A study in the New Forest found that placing posters advertising Samaritans helpline service resulted in a reduction in suicide from 10 to 3 per annum\(^1\). This reduction was shown over three years.

**Recommended Action**

Placement of signs and literature to raise awareness of Samaritans helpline service, particularly in areas where such signs are visible upon entering the premises and where people may loiter.

**Resource** — Digital versions of approved posters are available free of charge from Samaritans — please contact 020 8394 8300 or admin@samaritans.org

**Working with the local media**

**Evidence** — There are a number of studies which have linked the portrayal of suicide in the media to an increase in suicidal behaviour. The research suggests that where particular methods are portrayed or where incidents have been sensationalised there is a particular risk of copycat suicides.

A German television series, *Death of a Student*, depicted the railway suicide of a young man at the start of each episode. During the series, railway suicides by teenage males increased by 175%. Suicide by other fatal methods did not decrease so it seems that the series created a real increase in suicide, rather than simply influencing the choice of method\(^2\).

**Recommended Action**

- Ensure relevant personnel are aware of Samaritans media guidelines
- Work with local media to ensure that any coverage of suicide is appropriate
- Ensure relevant personnel are aware of the support available from the Publicity Officer of the local Samaritans branch

**Resource** — Contacts for local branches and copies of Samaritans’ Media Guidelines are available for download at www.samaritans.org

**Training**

**Evidence** — Samaritans runs a programme for staff to develop their confidence and competence in dealing with people in distress increasing the likelihood of intervention. Samaritans has trained over 3000 people in how to work with people who may be in distress. These day long training courses cover:

- Understanding suicide
- Identifying suicidal intent
- Approaching a person at risk
- Responding to someone with suicidal thoughts
- Overcoming barriers to listening
- Using the Listening Wheel (a technique used by Samaritans volunteers)
- Ending a conversation
- Making sensitive third party referrals
- Using support
- Putting skills into practice

**Benefits of the training include:**

- **For the individual:**
  - Increased confidence and reduced stress when responding to a person at risk
- **Team:**
  - Able to support each other when handling suicidal contacts
- **For the person at risk:**
  - Feel valued
  - Increased likelihood of successful intervention by staff
- **For the organisation:**
  - Trained and effective staff
  - Contributing to the Government initiative to reduce the suicide rate
  - Reduced costs

**Resource** — Further information on Samaritans’ External Training Services can be obtained from the External Training Services Co-ordinator on 020 8394 8300 or externaltraining@samaritans.org

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About this booklet

This booklet outlines a number of measures which may be put in place by agencies seeking to reduce suicides at railway stations. Developed by Samaritans and endorsed by the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) and the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) this resource is focused on action and is designed to inform decision makers.

Further copies of this guide are available from the website of the RSSB or Samaritans

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Further information

The Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk) has produced general guidance on suicide hotspots which can be obtained from their website www.csip-plus.org.uk/RowanDocs/SuicideHotspots.pdf

For further information on Samaritans or the work of the charity, please contact 020 8394 8300 or admin@samaritans.org.

Here are the different ways to get in touch with Samaritans. We're here to listen 24 hours a day, 365 days a year:

☎ 08457 90 90 90 (1850 60 90 90 Republic of Ireland)*
☎ 08457 90 91 92 (1850 60 90 91 Republic of Ireland)*
✉ Chris, PO Box 90 90, Stirling, FK8 2SA
✉ jo@samaritans.org
✉ www.samaritans.org

Or you can drop into your local branch to meet with a Samaritans volunteer face to face. To locate the nearest branch look in the phone book, visit www.samaritans.org/talk/face2face.html or details may be enclosed below.

*All calls charged at local rate.

www.samaritans.org

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