

SUMMARY

FATAL LEVEL CROSSING ACCIDENT IN NURMIJÄRVI, FINLAND, ON 25 MARCH 2009

On Wednesday, 25 March 2009, a level crossing accident involving a van and a freight train occurred on the Hyvämäki level crossing in Nurmijärvi. The accident was fatal to the van driver. The engine driver, the shunting foreman and two shunters who were on the train came through the accident uninjured. The van was wrecked beyond repair. The train sustained minor damage.

The direct cause of the accident was the driver of the van advancing onto the level crossing without stopping at the STOP sign. It is likely that the driver of the van completely failed to notice the freight train approaching from the right. This may have been due to the following:

- the driver was focused on something other than making a safe crossing
- the intermediate wall between the van's cabin and storage space, and also the absence of windows in the storage space, hindered visibility in the direction of the approaching train.
- the sun shining in the driver's face blinded him.

In order to prevent similar accidents, the Investigation Commission recommends that the wait platforms of the Hyvämäki level crossing be renovated and that nearby road junctures be relocated at a sufficient distance from the crossing. The level crossing should also be equipped with a warning installation with half-barriers. Due to difficulties experienced in locating the level crossing after the accident, the investigation commission reiterates recommendation S143: *Level crossings should be equipped with signboards displaying at least the name of the level crossing and its location in coordinates, and the relevant track-km. The signboard should be clearly visible in both directions in which the road runs.*

In addition, to further reduce difficulties in locating the scenes of accidents, the investigation commission recommends the preparation of a list of level crossings, including their locations within sections of line, and that this list be made available to engine drivers, traffic controllers and the emergency response centre. The list should clearly indicate the name and location of the level crossing. This would ease communication between the parties and reduce time spent locating level crossings. In addition, the Emergency Response Centre Administration should ensure that location information be uniformly introduced in all emergency response centres.

In its statement, the Emergency Response Centre Administration proposes that VR Group equip all trains with the appropriate GPS¹ devices, which would relay accurate coordinates for any accident to the relevant response centre without delay. In addition, the Emergency Response Centre Administration reiterates its earlier recommendation, that a direct mobile phone connection be ensured from the accident sites to the relevant emergency response centre.

¹ GPS = Global Positioning System