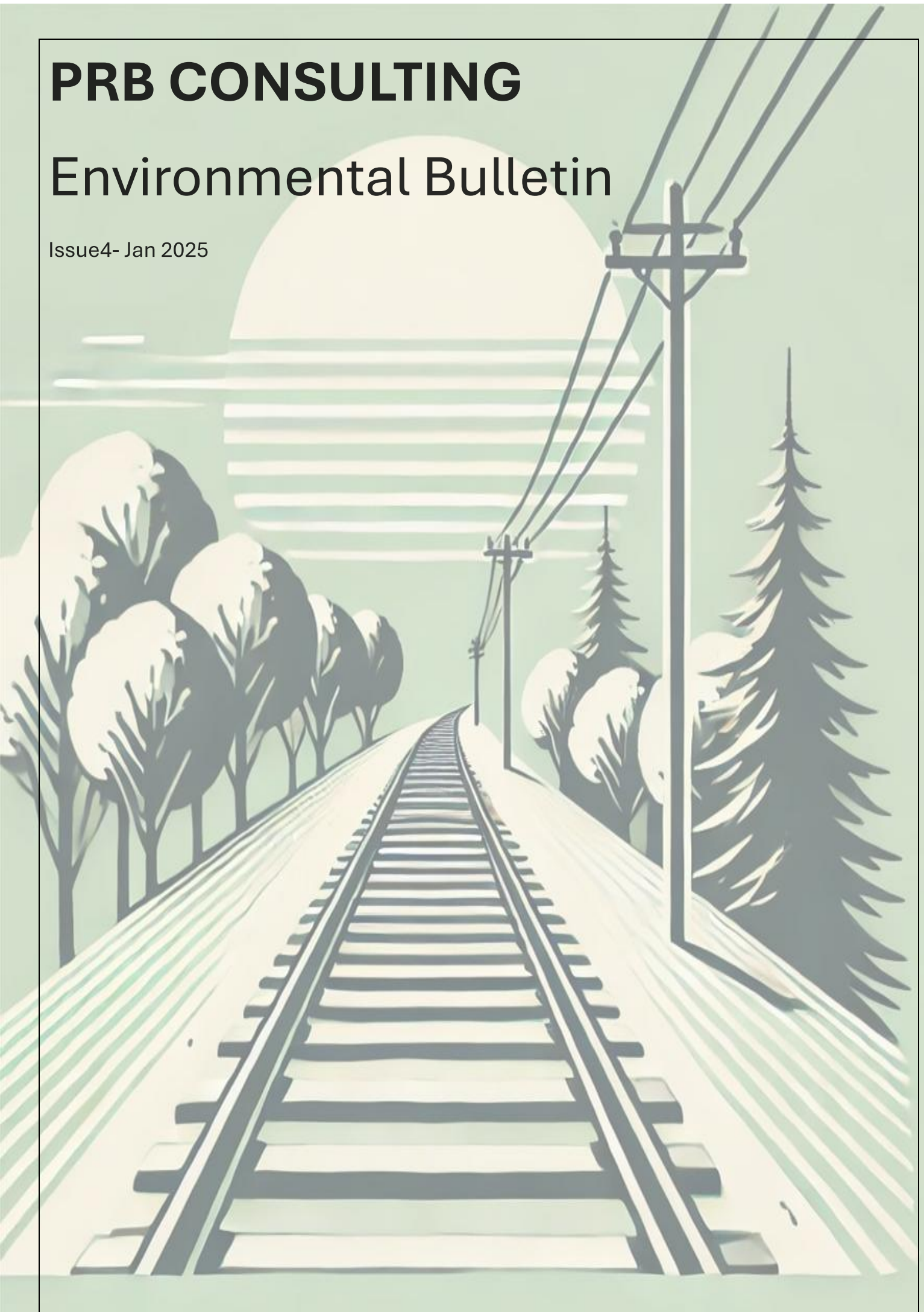


# PRB CONSULTING

## Environmental Bulletin

Issue4- Jan 2025



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# Network Rail Looks to Help Adders Multiply on the Network

Network Rail has released a short film about the reptilian and amphibian wildlife that lives alongside the railway. The new video sees ecologist Alex Baldwin address the question of whether adders could be encouraged to multiply in the rail environment.

Britain's only venomous snakes are rare, but they are found across all parts of the country, from Cornwall to Scotland, and Network Rail believes that some of the habitats created by the railway are perfect for them and other reptiles. A notable location is Shap Fell, between Penrith and Oxenholme, on the West Coast Main Line, featured in the film.



For starters, signalling and power cables are traditionally placed in concrete troughs along the line, which provide fantastic sheltered and warm spots for snakes to hide and in the breeding season, for grass snakes to look after their eggs and adders to give birth.

Alex said: "The nature of the lineside is that it creates excellent spaces for snakes to bask – as cold-blooded animals they can't raise their body temperatures any other way – but there is also usually enough vegetation to provide homes for the creatures they eat too and places to hide from predators. And very importantly, there is minimal disturbance from people, which is key.

"We're also managing our lineside more sensitively today. We try and retain low-growing native species, create features such as log piles, and generally improve the lineside as a wildlife corridor."

Alex added: "We advise our colleagues working on the railway on how to be respectful of snakes, not just because they are protected species, but also because adders are venomous. Although their bites are rarely serious, it's still not something you want to be dealing with at work!"

The video – also available on YouTube and other social media – also investigates a former railway yard in Northamptonshire, which has been turned into a natural haven for wildlife and eventually, it is hoped, Great Crested Newts.

Source: Network Rail



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# Contaminated Land

## What is contaminated land?

Contaminated land refers to land that by reason of substances in, on, or under the land, is causing, or could cause, significant harm to people, protected species or pollution to surface and groundwater.

Much of our land surrounding the railway has historically been used for things like freight storage and refuelling, which means there is a chance it is now contaminated. We may also have bought land which is contaminated, or our tenants may have caused contamination.

## Why is contaminated land important to Network Rail?

The nature of our works means that our operations can pose a high risk for the environment. If we are working on a designated contaminated land site there is a risk that if we do not manage our works appropriately we may open up a contaminant pathway and cause harm to either the environment and/or human health. It is also important that we manage our works appropriately so as not to create any new sites of contaminated land.

## What is Network Rail's approach to contaminated land?

When planning works, the designated person will need to check and determine whether or not the land for the proposed works is classified as contaminated. This assessment will determine what action we need to take and will take the form of a desktop preview in the first instance. If the contamination is not moving or causing harm, we may not need to do anything, however we will need to ensure that our works are not going to open up a pathway for movement.

Primarily, records of contaminated land are available on Geo-RINM Viewer (Network Rail access only) but other potential sources should be consulted including the local authority's contaminated land registers. Where the reason for the contaminated land record is not given, tests may be necessary to determine what the land is contaminated with. We have contractors who can carry this out and, depending on the type and level of contamination found, we may need to make changes to budgets and timelines.

We have to take extra care with proposed works on contaminated land as there could be associated risks to our employees, and the possibility that our intervention could cause the contamination to spread. First we'd need to make sure we know what the land is contaminated with and what we can do to prevent the contamination spreading. Without improving or fixing contamination on a site, the activities that we can undertake maybe restricted.

We rely on good record keeping and need to have up-to-date information on our sites. If you have been working on contaminated land, you will need records for any close-out licences and consents at the end of the project. Even if you have not carried out your planned work because you have identified contaminated land, make sure databases are updated with the new records.

Source: Network Rail



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# Environmental Project Team Working to Protect Historic Rail Line and Transport Routes

As the world's first passenger railway celebrates its 200th anniversary, a team of engineers are helping to protect the line of the historic site and key transport routes - helping commuters keep moving as work progresses on a major environmental project.

Northumbrian Water is constructing a new sewer pipeline as part of an £11.2m project to upgrade its wastewater network, which will help to protect the environment.

The new 9km pipeline will pass under the original path of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, now part of the existing train line that connects Bishop Auckland and Saltburn, and the A67, which runs parallel.



Engineers are drilling 200 metres horizontally beneath the transport routes, to the east of Middleton St George, allowing the water company and its partners, Esh-Stantec, to install the new sewer without impacting road or rail traffic or disturbing the heritage site.

Specialist contractors, Terra, are carrying out the drilling work.

Work started on the new pipeline, which connects Long Newton with Middleton One Row, via Goosebeck, in March 2024 and is expected to finish in the Spring of 2025.

This innovative approach follows on from similar techniques used on a new sewer pipeline to the north of Durham in 2024, where Northumbrian Water's project team used similar methods, under the A167, protecting traffic flows, and under the East Coast Main Line, west of Brasside. Larger bore tunnelling techniques have also been employed by the water company on its £155m Project Pipeline: County Durham and Tees Valley, a major investment in water supply infrastructure, allowing new pipes to be installed under the River Tees and A68.

Paul Davison, Northumbrian Water's Project Manager, said: "This project is part of our Water Industry National Environment Programme and represents significant investment not only in enhancing our network to better serve customers, but also in protecting the environment.

"This drilling allows us to deliver this important road and rail crossing without impacting traffic or trains and in a way that protects this world-famous heritage line in its 200th anniversary year.

"The Stockton & Darlington Railway is a hugely important part of this region's history and identity and played a major role in the development of passenger rail travel as we know it today, and we are glad to have been able to use this tunnelling technique to protect the line."

Source: [nwg.co.uk](http://nwg.co.uk)



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# Noise pollution: A Hidden Health Hazard

Noise can be annoying, but also dangerous and potentially lethal. The House of Lords' Science and Technology Committee says the Government should not turn a deaf ear to a new report warning of significant health and economic costs, Jon Herbert reports.



Noise can go beyond simply annoying and robbing us of valuable sleep hours, says a new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) study which looked at how too much noise can badly affect health and wellbeing, as well as disrupt important circadian (24-hour cycle) rhythms.

The findings — supported by European Environment Agency data which showed that noise pollution causes thousands of deaths — are so worrying that a powerful House of Lords committee wants swift government action.

## Who is affected?

“Noise annoyance” refers to people very bothered or disturbed by noise over a long period that initially reduces their wellbeing and quality of life, but can cause depression, anxiety and heart disease.

Study data shows that circa 40% of adults in England are exposed to long-term averaged road traffic noise levels above 50 decibels (dB). Health effects are more likely to be detected above 50dB Lden — typically the level in quiet streets.

## Noise and planning

The findings are so acute that the study recommends future noise health impacts should be part of transport infrastructure and urban planning decision-making — with better acoustic design in residential developments.

In parallel, noise exposure in existing transport infrastructure needs to be cut with technologies for quieter road surfaces, tyres and vehicles, plus smoother train wheels and rails and improved flight paths.

## Fatal statistics

The UN names air pollution as the world's largest environmental health threat leading to seven million global deaths annually. The European Environment Agency says noise pollution comes next, linked to 12,000 annual premature deaths. The HSE's Workplace Health Expert Committee has also highlighted the threat of noise in their 2023 report on The Likely Prevalence of Occupational Noise Induced Hearing Loss Across British Industry.



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## Let there be light — and noise but less of both

The July 2023 Science and Technology Committee report on human health impacts of artificial light and noise described them as poorly understood and regulated “neglected pollutants”.

UKHSA suggests the equivalent of 130,000 healthy life years are lost to noise pollution in Britain annually. In addition, sleep disturbance costs the economy a possible £34 billion a year, according to RAND Europe, with noise and light pollution being contributing factors.

The Science and Technology Committee is concerned that the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan mentions noise and light pollution only briefly, with no specific reduction targets, and thinks light and noise pollution often fall through “cracks” between departments and central and local government policies.



## Moving forward

The Science and Technology Committee recommends the following.

- Defra, UKHSA and other organisations assess the harmful health effects of noise.
- Defra sets a methodology to track, monitor and report indoor/outdoor light pollution.
- A noise expert advisory group gives the Government independent advice while collecting and assessing new evidence, particularly on emerging health effects.
- The Government sets a target to cut the health burden of noise pollution with new mapping tools for the next five-year Environmental Improvement Plan cycle.
- There should be stronger interdepartmental co-ordination on light and noise pollution with “levers” to respond to problems Defra identifies.
- The Government should resource and incentivise local authorities with funding, information and expertise to ensure they can regulate light and noise pollution in line with its targets.

## Regulations

The Environmental Noise (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended) apply mainly to environmental noise from transport and require regular noise mapping and action planning for road, rail and aviation, plus large urban areas (agglomerations).

Noise Action Plans based on these maps are needed for road, rail and agglomeration noise, with mitigation suggestions. Major airports, and those affecting agglomerations, must publish their own separate Noise Action Plans.

The regulations do not cover noise created by neighbours, at workplaces and inside transport systems, although the Government has published guidance on Noise from Roads, Trains or Planes and Aviation Strategy.



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## Practical noise reduction on industrial sites

Noise and noise exposure at work can be reduced in many ways. The first priority is to remove loud noise, followed by controlling noises at the source, redesigning workplaces and reorganising working patterns.

The next priority is protecting individual workers. The HSE has published guidance, which can be found at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk). In summary, HSE's recommendations include the following.

Considering different processes or equipment such as:

- quieter ways of working
- replacing noise sources with less noisy alternatives
- introducing low-noise machinery and equipment purchasing policies.

Introducing engineering controls such as:

- avoiding metal-on-metal impacts, say, with abrasion-resistant rubber and reduced drop heights
- adding damping material where vibrating machine panels create noise
- isolating vibrating machinery with anti-vibration mounts or flexible couplings
- fit silencers to air exhausts and blowing nozzles.

Modifying air pathways through which noise travels to exposed people by:

- erecting enclosures around machines to reduce the noise emitted
- using barriers and screens to block the direct path of sound
- positioning noise sources away from employees.

Designing a workplace layout for low noise emission by:

- using absorptive materials like open-cell foam or mineral wool to reduce reflected sound
- keeping noisy machinery and processes away from quieter areas
- designing workflow to keep noise out of areas where people spend most of their time.
- limiting time spent in noisy areas — every halving of time reduces noise exposure by 3dB.

Good maintenance is also essential because deterioration with age can increase noise levels.

### Industrial Noise Pollution



Source: Croner-i



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# Recent HSE Court Cases

## Repeated wood dust failures lands company with fine

An Essex-based company that makes windows and doors has been hit with a fine after repeatedly failing to protect its workers from exposure to wood dust.

Three HSE inspectors during the past 12 years had resulted in improvement notices being issued, along with other action taken. However, despite this, the company still failed to act, including to provide its workers with suitable RPE.

LEGAL BREACHES	FINE	COURT COSTS
Regulation 9(2), 11(1) and 7(1) of Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002	£4,000	£2,792

## Stone company fined after repeatedly failing to protect workers

A company that produces stone products and its director have been fined after repeatedly failing to protect workers from exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS).

The HSE carried out several inspections at the site, which produces carved stone masonry products using limestone, sandstone, granite and marble, starting in May 2023. When inspectors returned in September 2023 5 improvement notices still hadn't been complied with.

LEGAL BREACHES	FINE	COURT COSTS
Section 21 of Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 Regulation 7(1) & 9(2)a of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002	£18,000	£4,064

## Council fined after employees exposed to risks from vibrating tools

A worker who repaired potholes was diagnosed with Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS), an occupational disease, following repeated exposure to vibration tools.

This week, his employer, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has been fined following a prosecution by the HSE.

LEGAL BREACHES	FINE	COURT COSTS
Section 33(1)(a) & 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974	£60,000	£5,775.70



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