

Confidential Reporting for Safety

A good practice guide for responding to a CIRAS report



Another line of defence

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Background

CIRAS was set up by ScotRail in 1996 and gradually more railway companies volunteered to join the scheme. Following a rail accident at Ladbroke Grove in 1999, all UK mainline rail companies had to become members of a confidential Reporting system and in 2000 CIRAS went national.

Lord Cullen at the time stated that:

“It is hoped that in the longer term the culture of the industry would be such as to make confidential reporting unnecessary. I accept that this situation may be a long time in coming to pass in the industry. In the meantime I fully support and encourage the CIRAS system.”

The service has historically been available to all rail workers throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Recently we have now expanded into new transport modes including Light Rail, Bus, Aviation and Marine. This service is for anyone working within these industries, from frontline to office staff.

The purpose of this pack

The purpose of this pack is to provide you, the CIRAS Rep, with information, guidelines and examples of good practice when dealing with CIRAS Reports.

Introduction

What is a CIRAS Rep?

CIRAS Reps are the main point of contact within a company and one of your key responsibilities will be to explain who we are and what we do.

The role typically involves:

- Receiving reports and sending responses
- Attending CIRAS reps meetings
- Receiving regular updates from CIRAS
- Promoting CIRAS within your organisation, making sure it is fully integrated into your company's safety processes.

You can help promote CIRAS by:

- Distributing *The CIRAS Newsletter*
- Ensuring posters and leaflets are visible
- Communicating CIRAS's message within your company, for example as part of the induction process or by adding a link to our website www.ciras.org.uk on your intranet page.

The majority of our Reps work within the health, safety and environmental departments of their organisations. The role of a CIRAS Rep varies according to different companies. Some Reps will investigate the reports and write the responses themselves while others take on a coordinating role of identifying suitable people within their organisation to respond to the reports. Reps are also responsible for raising awareness of CIRAS within their company. Advertising materials can be a great tool for promoting CIRAS in training and briefing sessions. This can also give you the opportunity to re-endorse company policy and remind staff of the internal reporting systems in place. *The CIRAS Newsletter* is published every two months and is a good source of information for CIRAS updates, examples of reports and guest articles.

CIRAS Reps meetings

CIRAS Reps meetings offer you the opportunity to give us feedback, share good practice and raise issues with our team. The meetings are also useful for you to get together with colleagues from across the transport industry. Reps will be informed in advance when the Reps meetings will take place. Please refer to our website www.ciras.org.uk for future dates.

Who reports to CIRAS?

Anyone working for subscribing organisations, who has a health, safety, security or environmental concern, can report to CIRAS. (We cannot process reports from members of the public)

Why do people choose to raise concerns through CIRAS?

- It is confidential and independent.
- They believe an external body will have more impact.
- They have reported it through internal channels and nothing has happened.

Some of the reasons CIRAS reporters do not report their concerns internally include:

- A fear of repercussions such as losing their job or being branded a troublemaker.
- A lack of faith in action being taken.
- A perception that their company is more interested in meeting deadlines than improving safety.

We do occasionally receive reports which may be malicious in nature and CIRAS Reporting Analysts have been trained to identify such reports. However, the majority of reporters take their time to contact us because they are passionate about the industry they work for and are concerned not only for their own safety but also that of their colleagues and the public.

For many reporters, making a report to CIRAS is not an easy decision. When they contact us they often need further reassurance that their identity will be protected before they decide to progress the report any further. As a CIRAS Rep, if you provide a response which allays the reporter's concern, you can help build trust among your colleagues and show that the company is passionate about health and safety.

The lifecycle of a CIRAS report

Below is a diagram which shows the process involved in making a CIRAS report. The approximate timescale for a CIRAS report to reach completion is two to three months.

Contacts that are not deemed appropriate by the reporting analysis team will be re-directed to the most relevant reporting channel.

1 Your concern

Always try to report it internally. If you have or you feel you can't then contact CIRAS

2 Contacting us

You can do this by calling or texting us, filling in a form and positing it or via our web site

3 Our response

We ensure complete confidentiality and process reports in an environment which maintains this

4 We take your call

With your permission to interview, an experienced analyst will listen to your concern and take notes



5 We contact the company of concern

We write to the company being reported and advise them of the concern

6 The company investigates

Through the CIRAS rep we look to facilitate a resolution that remedies the concern

7 Feedback

We get in touch with you and provide you with feedback. We also seek your feedback on the reporting process

8 We analyse

We look for lessons that others can learn from and with your company's permission share these with others

Types of reports that CIRAS deal with

CIRAS can be used to report practices or incidents which are perceived to be potentially dangerous to the individual, their colleagues or to the safety of the public.

Typically we receive reports about:

- Unsafe Practices
- Work environment issues
- Failure to follow procedures
- Lack of training or qualifications to do a particular task
- Lack of safety briefings
- Community safety
- Fatigue
- Vandalism and trespassing

CIRAS realises these concerns often reflect broader issues within the industry. We do not seek to blame individuals and do not name individuals in any of our reports. However, we do encourage companies to look into their working practices if we receive reports from them.

CIRAS cannot take reports about:

- Personal grievances
- Urgent real-time issues
- Personnel issues
- Individual drugs and alcohol issues

CIRAS often receives reports which because confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, are not processed.

Receiving a CIRAS report

Turning a potential negative into a positive

Quote from a CIRAS Rep

“Accepting that a colleague has made a CIRAS report is often a struggle at first. You can’t help but feel disappointed and it can seem like a criticism of the systems in place. However, I do believe that CIRAS is an invaluable tool. It allows me to see things from a frontline perspective and gives staff the opportunity to raise health and safety concerns confidentially.”

Generally a reporter contacts CIRAS because they are concerned about an issue which may affect the health or safety of staff or users of the operator they work for. Because this implies something is not working as it should, it can often be seen as a criticism of the duty holder for that particular concern. This is a natural reaction, however CIRAS does not judge – it only provides a channel for reporters to pass a health or safety concern on to their company.

CIRAS is also very focused on the report rather than the individual and realises these concerns often reflect broader issues within the industry.

Usually a reporter is someone who genuinely cares about the work they do and the safety of others and a report can actually generate a positive outcome for companies.

Examples of where reports can help your company include:

- Identifying a concern you may not otherwise have been made aware of.
- Understanding the perceptions of your workforce, particularly where a concern cannot be substantiated.
- Identifying communication and training needs.
- Sending a strong message to your workforce about your commitment to health, safety, security and the environment.
- Showing your workforce, and the rest of the industry, that you are happy for an external body to help you maintain a good health and safety record.

Sharing good practice

Ways to improve your response to a CIRAS report

This section of the Handbook will provide you with guidance to giving a good response. We have set out in five points what we believe is a pathway to good practice and ultimately a chance to show that you are positive about safety and positive about CIRAS.

Five ways to improve your response to a CIRAS report:

1. **Have a positive approach;** this makes the reporter feel they have done the right thing by raising their concern.
2. **Empathise with the reporter;** this puts you both on the same page and demonstrates that their concern is being taken seriously.
3. **Write in plain English;** so that the message is clearly received.
4. **Show commitment;** so that the reporter has faith in the reporting system.
5. **Manage expectations;** it is important that if the desired resolution cannot be met, the reasons behind this are given. It is better to do this than mislead the reporter or ignore their concern.

Read on for a more detailed breakdown of what each of these approaches entails.

Sharing good practice

1. Having a positive approach

Using a positive tone in your CIRAS response can let the reporter know that you appreciate their help in identifying these concerns.

A positive response to a report can also encourage staff to use internal reporting processes when they have future safety concerns.

2. Empathise with the reporter

Your response to a report can send a strong message to the reporter, your colleagues and the industry (especially if it is published in *The CIRAS Newsletter*). By empathising with the reporter you are showing that you are dedicated to making improvements within your industry and that health and safety is an integral part of your company's structure, which can give your workforce the confidence to take future issues directly to the company.

To demonstrate empathy in your response:

- Reflect that you are glad the issue has been raised by first thanking the reporter.
- Acknowledge any valid concerns in your response and provide a clear clarification about why the current operation is within safe working practice where the concern is not valid.
- Where you are at fault, understand that by accepting responsibility it expresses your company's eagerness to address the issue, indicating good practice.
- Take the time to respond quickly and efficiently to display the strength of your company's commitment.
- Be transparent throughout the whole process to indicate your company's openness to resolve issues and willingness to finding a way forward.

Sharing good practice

3. Style – write in plain English

Plain English refers to a style of writing which is simple to understand and delivers a clear message. This is the style a CIRAS Rep would use to write their response to a reporter. By keeping the reader in mind as you write, you are more likely to get your message across without being misunderstood.

The basic principles of Plain English are:

- Keep your sentences short – ideally a sentence should contain one point. If a sentence contains more than this it can be confusing.
- Less is best. Don't use 30 words to say what you can in 20 and avoid long words.
- Avoid jargon and consider whether you need to explain any technical terms.
- Expand acronyms in the first instance.

CIRAS is committed to the principles of Plain English. For more information, and to use their guidelines, please go to www.plainenglish.co.uk.

To help with your understanding of this, here is an example which shows how to make the same point in different ways.

Before

"If there are any points on which you require an explanation or further particulars we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone."

After

"If you have any questions, please phone."

Sharing good practice

4. Show commitment

A response that shows a plan of action, or even that the issue has already been resolved, demonstrates a company's commitment to fixing problems quickly and shows that your company has a positive attitude towards reporting and to health and safety. This shows your workforce that when issues are raised, they will be dealt with as soon as is practical.

5. Manage expectations

Sometimes, due to operational convenience or budgetary restraints, it is not possible to meet the expectations of reporters and therefore it is important to clearly outline this in your response. Especially in this day and age when the industry is governed by monetary value, it is important to show that safety is not comprised.

It is also reasonable, providing adequate safety measures are in place, to advise the reporter that the action they are requesting is not possible. In these instances a clear explanation of the current arrangements is usually included.

The CIRAS Reporting Analyst team

Our Reporting Analyst team are on hand weekdays during office hours and are happy to answer your questions. Based in a secure office where only authorised staff have access, you can be assured that confidentiality will never be compromised.

When the Analyst team receives a report, they will take out any information that could potentially identify the reporter and forward it on to you for a response. In this respect, the Reporting Analyst team acts only as an independent avenue for employees to raise safety issues in a confidential environment. They do not judge either the employee or the company and are aware the reports are not always substantiated.

Each Reporting Analyst is responsible for a number of companies. If you are unsure who your contact is, please call the team on 0800 4 101 101.

Data requests

CIRAS may be able to provide information on health, safety, environmental and security concerns for research purposes, subject to confidentiality issues. Some examples of past data requests made to CIRAS include:

- Operational safety reports
- Community safety reports
- Reports on misuse of level crossings by members of the public
- Near miss incidents

The CIRAS Reporting Analyst team

We can run a search on the CIRAS database to see if there is anything of special interest to your company. Requests can be made for ad hoc information or larger themed reports.

CIRAS does not release information for commercial purposes. If we receive a request regarding data involving other companies, CIRAS uses discretion before any information is released to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

If you wish to make use of this service, please make your request as early as possible if you have a deadline to meet.

If you would like to submit a data request or find out more information on this service, please call the team on 0800 4 101 101.

Promoting CIRAS within your organisation

We have a number of useful tools to keep you up to date about what we are doing and to raise awareness of CIRAS in your workplace.

The CIRAS Newsletter

The CIRAS Newsletter is published every two months and features topical articles as well as a selection of reports and responses from companies. It is available to anyone working in the transport industry and we can send copies to individual workplaces within your company.

We can also send you an electronic copy of *The CIRAS Newsletter* via email or you can download it from our website www.ciras.org.uk

Resources for the workplace

We can also send you a range of resources to help you raise awareness of CIRAS within your company.

We have posters and leaflets useful for displaying in meeting rooms, staff rooms and staff sign-on points.

For enquiries about having *The CIRAS Newsletter* sent to you or to change existing arrangements, please contact us at: enquiries@ciras.org.uk

Frequently Asked Questions

Why can't CIRAS provide more details in their reports?

We aim to provide as much information as we can to help you investigate the concerns raised in a report. However, sometimes details have to be removed in order to protect the identity of the reporter. This can include removing details of locations, times and specific incidents, if there is reasonable concern that the reporter might be identified from such information.

Under such circumstances we understand that it can be difficult to fully investigate and respond to a CIRAS report. However, it still provides an opportunity for you to communicate with your colleagues that you are positive about safety and positive about CIRAS. If you would like more information or support in dealing with such reports please contact us on 0800 4 101 101.

Will the company's response be published?

The response you provide could potentially be published in the newsletter or on the website if the reporter has given permission to do this.

Is it mandatory for reps to attend reps meetings?

No it is not mandatory, but we do strongly encourage you to attend. At a reps meeting you will get the chance to meet the team, get updates on what CIRAS is doing, share experience and to network with colleagues.

Frequently Asked Questions

I would like to provide feedback to CIRAS on their service. How can I do this?

We welcome your views and suggestions and there are many ways in which you can share them with us.

- We include an evaluation form at the end of the reporting process. Each evaluation form is considered and used to tailor our procedures to make them more helpful and useful. The more we receive the more we can improve our service so please keep sending them in.
- You can also call or email CIRAS with your views. This can be done by calling 0800 4 101 101 or emailing enquiries@ciras.org.uk

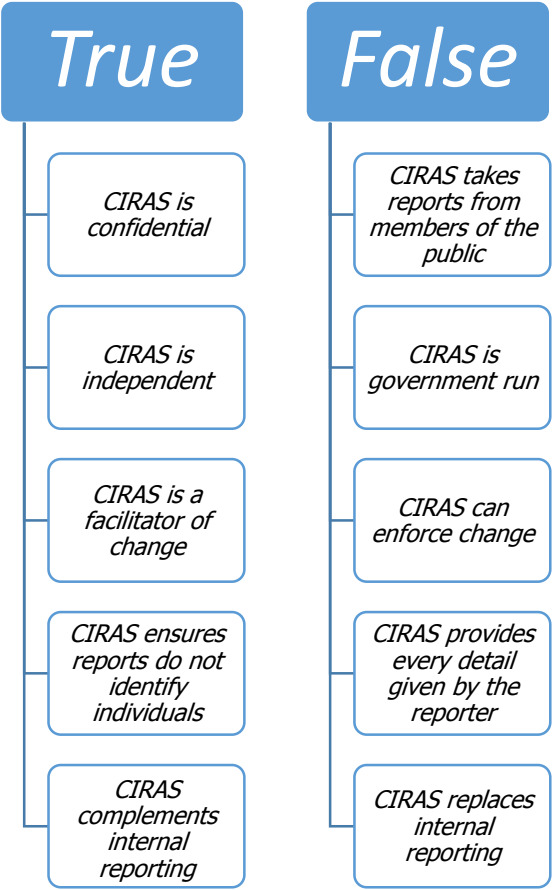
Why does CIRAS not enforce rules or changes?

We do not have the formal powers to investigate. CIRAS is simply a way in which a concern is recorded and delivered. Of course there will be incidents and circumstances in which the raising of a CIRAS report can lead to permanent changes within an organisation, but this will only ever be the consequence of the report's outcome, not a direct action that CIRAS has enforced.

There are regulatory bodies in place; the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) or the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), whose role it is to look at the rules and regulations currently in place and assess when these need to be updated or revised.

Remember, CIRAS are here to act as a facilitator to offer a confidential, independent system which compliments internal reporting channels already in place.

CIRAS: The facts



The diagram above summarises the key facts you need to know about CIRAS.

CIRAS

Confidential Reporting System



Address

4th Floor (located within RSSB)

The Helicon Building

1 South Place

London

EC2M 2RB

Contact us

Enquiries: 0203 142 5369

Report hotline: 0800 4 101 101

Report textline: 07507 285887

Email: equiries@ciras.org.uk

Website: www.ciras.org.uk