

Prague, 28 June 2018

While Cutting Vegetation, SŽDC Acts In Accordance with Valid Laws

Among others, the duties of Správa železniční dopravní cesty (SŽDC) as railway infrastructure manager in the Czech Republic include ensuring safety and smoothness of rail operation. Exceptional events which can stop train operation on railway lines can be caused i.a. by falls of trees into the trackage. SŽDC strives to limit such cases to a minimum and uses all its possibilities for this purpose. In accordance with valid laws, it cuts woody species within the protective zone of the railway.

Railway lines in the Czech Republic often pass through woody sections where trees grow in the immediate vicinity of tracks. The biggest problems occur during bad weather, especially during windstorms and hurricanes. For instance last October, the Herwart windstorm which passed over the territory of the Czech Republic caused falls of more than two hundred trees into the trackage. Almost in all cases, the trees were quite sane. In case of such calamities, SŽDC sends immediately dozens of employees to the event site, especially railway firemen, electricians, safety installations technicians and track workers who try to renew operation on the line as soon as possible.

Pursuant to Act No 266/1994 Coll., on Rail Systems, SŽDC is directly obligated to ensure safe and smooth railway operation and rail transport. For this purposes it fully uses also Act No 114/1992 Coll. as amended from 4 April 2017 on nature and landscape protection. Its Article 8 paragraph 2 allows SŽDC to remove woody plants for ensuring railway lines' operability or safe and smooth railway transport.

Compared to the previous years, SŽDC does not have to ask the respective nature protection body for permission; it must only notify the vegetation removal in writing at least 15 days in advance. The nature protection body can suspend, restrict or forbid the removal but exclusively based on a binding standpoint of the rail administration authority. In cases when a tree fall could cause immediate danger to human life or health or extensive damage, the removal can be notified even retroactively.

Although SŽDC intensified maintenance of vegetation in the protective zone of the railway in the last years, 70 collisions of trains with trees fallen into the trackage occur in average per year. In the last years however, falls of trees growing on estates of other owners start to prevail. In 2016, 48 collisions in total occurred causing direct damage on the railway infrastructure and rail vehicles for a sum of CZK 5.6 million. In 2017, the situation was influenced by the above-mentioned Herwart windstorm when 80 collisions occurred and damage exceeded CZK 6.6 million. This year, SŽDC registered already 33 collisions and damage for CZK 3.1 million.

An example of neglected care for trees can be an exceptional event which occurred on 19. June on the railway line Újezdec u Luhačovic – Luhačovice when a tree growing on a private estate outside the zone of the railway fell directly in front of an arriving train, damaged the engine driver's cabin and caused him cut wounds.

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