

# Deutsche Bahn: More deaths and a mounting number of victims on Germany's railway tracks

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At the beginning of December, there were two more serious and fatal workplace accidents at Deutsche Bahn (DB—Germany's national railway company).

On December 6, two workers were killed at the Cologne–Eifeltor freight yard after falling from a lifting platform. The two had been working at a height of almost 20 metres to repair a container loading bridge when, around midday, a third worker set another container loading bridge in motion. This second mobile bridge collided with the lifting platform on which the two men were standing in the work basket and caused it to tip over. The two men plunged to the ground, where they were crushed by the overturning lifting platform. One of the two, an 83-year-old (!) worker, was killed instantly. The other, aged 64, died later the same day in hospital from his severe injuries.

The Cologne–Eifeltor freight yard, one of the largest container transshipment yards, is operated by Deutsche Umschlaggesellschaft Schiene-Straße (DUSS), a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn. DUSS management had hired the workers via a subcontractor and thus exposed the 83-year-old and his colleague to this deadly danger.

Only two days before the tragic double fatality in Cologne, another serious workplace accident occurred at Deutsche Bahn at the ICE (InterCity Express—DB's high-speed flagship service) depot in Munich on Landsbergerstraße. A technician (56) suffered a severe electric shock while carrying out repair work on an overhead line. The line had been switched off, but there was a voltage flashover from a live overhead line on the adjacent track. The technician was thrown to the ground from his work platform. Thanks to his colleagues, who lowered the platform using the emergency release, he was quickly rescued and taken to hospital with life-threatening injuries.

When searching for the causes, the verdict that is usually delivered quickly is “human error.” This or that worker is said to have made a mistake. However, the alarming accumulation of accidents points very clearly to a systemic failure: the railways, which should be a public-interest-oriented infrastructure, are increasingly being geared towards profit, and workplace safety is being sacrificed as a result.

This year alone, there have already been at least twelve fatal workplace accidents at DB, including four fatal accidents within just four weeks in the spring. At least nine other workers were seriously injured. These accidents starkly illustrate what the rank-and-file Railway Action Committee has been explaining for years: in order to expose the causes of the accidents and prevent them in future, workers themselves must become active and organise in independent action committees.

Below is the long, presumably incomplete list of accidents this year:

- On March 4, 2025, two workers at the Munich ICE depot suffered dangerous electric shocks while carrying out maintenance work on the overhead line. One of them sustained third-degree injuries.
- On Easter Monday, April 21, a 52-year-old railway worker died in Kehl (Baden-Württemberg) in the harbour district on the Rhine River. During shunting operations, he was caught between the buffers while coupling two cars, crushed and fatally injured.
- On April 27, a railway worker was killed in an accident at the Neuseddin marshalling yard (Brandenburg) after also getting caught between two cars and being literally crushed.
- On April 29, a 58-year-old member of a construction crew in Hamburg was struck by an ICE train. He survived but sustained severe injuries.
- On May 9, a 50-year-old worker was once again crushed between two shunting freight cars while accompanying a slowly rolling car at the railway maintenance facility in Oberhausen (Upper Bavaria). He fell into the track between the trains and was killed.
- On May 14, a worker at the Wittenberge railway maintenance depot (Brandenburg) who had been carrying out sandblasting work was found dead.
- On May 23, two railway workers in Böblingen (Baden-Württemberg) suffered severe burns from electric shock. Here too, there was a voltage flashover from an overhead line.
- On June 24, a 35-year-old railway worker was killed while shunting in Kronach (Upper Franconia). The worker was riding on the last car to assist the driver when reversing a train but overlooked a track barrier. The railcar derailed, and the man fell into the track bed and was run over by the car.
- On July 3, a railway worker (30) in Düsseldorf-Rath was seriously injured during track work when a rail excavator ran over his leg and severed his foot.
- On July 30, during a serious railway accident in Riedlingen, the 32-year-old train driver and another railway employee (36) were killed. A female passenger was also killed.
- On August 19, a railway worker (49) died at the Horka freight yard (Saxony) when he was struck by an approaching train.
- On August 26, in Baar-Ebenhausen (Bavaria), a very young worker (21) was struck and killed by a regional train during track construction work.
- On September 17, a track worker (44) in Geislingen (Baden-Württemberg) was struck by a passing regional train and seriously injured.
- On September 25, a worker (30) north of Hamburg was seriously

injured when he was struck on the head by a train during track construction work in Wrist (Schleswig-Holstein).

- On September 30, another 21-year-old railway employee was killed after being struck by a regional train in Ebelsbach (Lower Franconia).

These are in addition to the two incidents that occurred in early December.

This accumulation of serious and even fatal workplace accidents at Deutsche Bahn is breathtaking and shows recurring patterns. This alone refutes the focus on the alleged “human error” of individual workers.

One fatal pattern is evident. For example, in accidents at marshalling and freight yards, where train drivers and railway workers shunt and couple long trains, often in reverse, and often while standing outside the cab, on the last car or alongside the train. This sort of procedure has repeatedly resulted in serious and fatal accidents. Today, these dangers could be entirely avoided through modern technology such as fully integrated cameras, remote control and automated processes and safety systems.

The problem, of course, is not confined to Germany. On December 3, 46-year-old train driver Steve Crowe was killed in a collision during such a shunting manoeuvre in Ontario, California. He was directing his train while reversing, a particularly dangerous situation. As the *World Socialist Web Site* reports, of the 20 train driver fatalities reported to the US rail authority since January 2020, 14 occurred during such shunting manoeuvres.

Another major danger arises when track construction work is carried out on double-track sections while train traffic continues. Only one track is closed, and the work is noisy, meaning warning signals are not always heard. Often, the signalling control centre that is supposed to warn the drivers of passing trains about the construction site is not adequately informed. In recent times, several workers have been struck on the head by passing ICE or regional trains. This was also how Ali Ceyhan (33) was killed on September 11, 2023 in Cologne-Kalk.

Overhead lines, which usually carry 15,000 volts, also pose a major danger. Repeatedly, they cause life-threatening injuries and third-degree burns. Thus, at the same Munich ICE depot, severe burns from electric shock occurred both on March 4 and on December 4. In Baden-Württemberg as well, two young workers, aged just 20 and 26, were seriously injured by electric shocks. It is always asserted the line was switched off and grounded, yet repeatedly voltage arcs occur from neighbouring overhead lines.

Three years ago, Frank S., a member of the Rail Action Committee, suffered a severe electric shock in Frankfurt am Main during such an incident. “I could have been dead,” Frank said at the time. His accident showed the newly founded Rail Action Committee how quickly the public adopts the version of events put forward by DB, the police, the employers’ liability insurance associations or the trade unions, blaming “human error.” It also led the committee to begin intensively investigating railway accidents.

None of these cases is an isolated misfortune. Rather, they are the result of a system that places profit above the lives and well-being of workers and is also rapidly gearing itself for war.

As a result, workplace safety is not a priority for any of those responsible: not for new DB executive board member Evelyn Palla, not for the federal government as owner of Deutsche Bahn, not for the supervisory authorities and not for the rail trade unions EVG and GDL. DB must become “faster, leaner and more economical,” as

Transport Minister Patrick Schnieder (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) declared.

Characteristically, no authority in Germany systematically lists all railway accidents. As a rule, the public only learns about them through brief, terse sentences in police reports. Nor is there reporting on the train drivers who recognise a dangerous situation and initiate an emergency braking manoeuvre but are unable to prevent the accident. They are usually severely shocked and traumatised.

Recently, several relatives of railway workers killed in rail accidents have made serious accusations in public because they have received no information or clarification regarding the deaths of their loved ones. Among these courageous individuals who refuse to give up are Katharina Duarte, partner of the points mechanic Ali Ceyhan who was killed in Cologne-Kalk, as well as Silke Hedemann and Steffen Rach, who lost their son and railway apprentice Simon Hedemann. They have also presented these cases to members of parliament from all parties and demanded answers from the DB corporation—so far without any visible result.

The only way to meaningfully respond to the appalling series of workplace accidents on the railways is the building of independent action committees, that is, a political reorientation of the working class toward its own class strength. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) propose the establishment of independent, democratically run action committees led by workers themselves to investigate the accidents, draw conclusions from them and *enforce* these conclusions.

These accidents are a global phenomenon: the IWA-RFC has already taken up similar cases in the United States, Australia, Germany, Turkey and Sri Lanka. What is necessary is international cooperation by the working class to wage the struggle together across national borders, exchange information and defend one another. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the IWA-RFC offer advice and contact with like-minded individuals, with guaranteed protection for whistle-blowers.



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