

NEWS RELEASE

Police on board to promote cane train safety

Wilmar Sugar's 'Burdekin' locomotive had an extra passenger on board last week, with Ayr Police Senior Sergeant Steve Barton joining the loco crew for part of their run through the Airdale area.

Burdekin Police and Wilmar Sugar have long worked together to promote cane train safety across the district during the annual crushing season.

Sen Sgt Barton's loco ride was organised to enable him to experience, first-hand, the size and force of a moving cane train.

Sen Sgt Barton said it provided a new perspective on cane railway operations.

"Certainly, some of the stories told by the crew of near misses and other incidents show that some drivers are risking it all by disregarding the flashing red lights and racing trains across crossings," he said.

"Caution and good driving sense dictates that a driver of a vehicle, when approaching a level crossing, slows down and remains vigilant for approaching trains, whether or not these crossings are controlled by flashing red lights.

"Drivers should show patience to trains approaching or crossing these crossings or when conducting other operations, such as shunting.

"Given the size and bulk of these cane trains, it is more probable that the vehicle will come off second best in a collision, not to mention the driver's civil liability and the possibility of injury, death or enforcement action for their actions."

Burdekin Cane Supply Manager Steve Postma said people tended to underestimate the force of cane trains, which could be up to 200 bins long or more than 1500 tonnes of rolling weight.

“They’re definitely not something you want to collide with,” he said.

He said while the region had been fortunate to avoid any serious incidents so far this season, motorists regularly put themselves at risk by failing to give way to oncoming cane trains.

“A minority of motorists seem to consider the sight of an approaching cane train or flashing red warning lights at a crossing a reason to speed up and try to race through the area,” he said.

“In addition to being dangerous and foolish, it’s also illegal.

“We appreciate the support we receive from the police, where possible, to track down motorists who do the wrong thing.”

Mr Postma said that in addition to its cane rail operations, Wilmar Sugar operated a wide range of vehicles and machinery on public roads.

“Whether they’re driving a utility, haulout or locomotive, all of our operators are subject to the same rules as the general public,” he said.

“Police routinely breath-test our loco drivers if they have been involved in a collision and they are also able to conduct random testing.”

Mr Postma said Wilmar Sugar employees were also subject to the company’s fit for duty policy, which includes both alcohol and drug testing.

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