



Fire fighting train opens Waalhaven (Rotterdam) for dangerous goods

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From today, 1 April 2021, shunting of almost all dangerous goods is permitted again at Waalhaven South yard in the port of Rotterdam. This is thanks to an extinguishing train, that was developed as a temporary solution for the emplacement yard. Waalhaven has been unavailable for the shunting of dangerous goods since 13 September 2019, because the fire safety facilities did not meet the local standards.

The extinguishing train consists of five large water tanks of 150,000 liters in total, a wagon with extinguishing material and foaming agent and a locomotive. The fire-fighting train is a temporary addition to the total package of extinguishing facilities. This means that the normal fire truck of the Rotterdam Common Fire Service is still available. With the fire-fighting train and the fire-fighting truck from the calamity road, all intermediate tracks on the Waalhaven South yard can be covered, says ProRail.

Extinguishing trains

Extinguishing trains are not an entirely new phenomenon, but this is a first for the Netherlands. Trains like these are particularly used for tunnel fires, in Austria and

Switzerland, among others. In the case of Waalhaven South, the train was needed as not all of the tracks could be reached from the calamity road that was constructed. ProRail is now working on a structural solution, but until this is found, the train will remain in place.

“We have worked very hard on the realisation with our partners Kenbri, Shunter, H2K and KSS”, says ProRail. “The train has been extensively tested until the end of March and all findings and test reports have been shared with the competent authority. On Wednesday, 31 March, we received an official message that the fire extinguishing facilities at Waalhaven South have been approved as a temporary facility, which we will replace in the longer term with the structural facilities.”

Freight carriers

For freight transporters, this means that most of the dangerous goods can be handled again, after more than 18 months of restrictions. The temporary closure has had a major impact on the industry, as operators had to relocate to other shunting yards to keep operations running. This has resulted in higher costs for rail operators and other parties in the supply chain.

Prorail had earlier set up a compensation scheme for affected customers, so that the extra costs incurred, such as hiring additional staff and longer use of locomotives, did not impact too much.

Timeline

The first problems at Waalhaven Zuid date from mid-September 2019. At that time, the fire safety authorities DCMR and VRR requested ProRail to conduct an integral test of the deployment of the company fire brigade and the functioning of the extinguishing water supply. The test did not go well. The extinguishing water system was not adequate. Immediately, the railway manager stopped shunting dangerous goods.

The rail infrastructure company then started to look for alternatives. The construction of a temporary extinguishing system seemed the best option. In practice, this turned out to be more difficult. Several solutions were rejected by the authorities over time. The extinguishing train is the first solution deemed appropriate.