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Southeastern fined for runaway train failings

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Train operator Southeastern has been fined £65,000 and ordered to pay costs of £22,590 after one of its trains ran out of control for more than three miles in November 2010.

The Office of Rail Regulation prosecuted the company for breaches of health and safety law following the incident in East Sussex. On 8 November 2010, the 0645 London Charing Cross to Hastings service was approaching, and due to stop at, Stonegate station, when the train's braking system failed. Instead of making its scheduled stop at Stonegate, the train passed the station at approximately 50mph and continued, with its emergency brake continuously applied, through a level crossing before finally coming to rest 3.22 miles from where the brakes were first applied.

Friday's (6 July) sentencing at Maidstone Crown Court follows an ORR investigation

into the incident, which found that Southeastern had failed to provide an effective system of work to reliably ensure the availability of sand on its Class 375 trains for use as part of the braking system. In order to improve braking performance sand is deposited on to the track when the brakes are used, increasing friction and reducing braking distance. ORR's investigation also found that, in addition to the runaway train, four more Southeastern trains showed evidence of not having sand supplies refilled.

Ian Prosser, director of railway safety at ORR, said: "In this case, Southeastern, through poor planning and management, failed to ensure their trains were safe for use on the rail network. This is clearly unacceptable, and led to the potentially catastrophic incident in East Sussex where a train ran out of control for over three miles. We welcome steps taken by Southeastern to improve its safety management since this incident."

Southeastern pleaded guilty to two charges under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 on 14 May 2012 at Sevenoaks Magistrates' Court.

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