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# Voorschoten Train Collision: A Tragic Reminder of Rail Safety Concerns

## Description

On the early morning of 4 April 2023, a devastating rail incident occurred in Voorschoten, South Holland, Netherlands. A freight train collided with a road-rail crane that had obstructed the railway line. Mere moments later, a passenger train, hurtling down the same tracks, also collided with the equipment. The crash resulted in the derailment of the passenger train and the death of the crane operator. Thirty others were injured, with nineteen requiring hospitalization.

## The Events Leading to the Collision

At approximately 03:25 CEST (01:25 UTC), a freight train operated by DB Cargo was travelling along the line connecting Leiden Centraal with Den Haag Centraal and Den Haag Hollands Spoor. The train, pulled by a DBAG Class 189 locomotive, encountered a crane positioned on the railway track. The impact severely damaged the locomotive, although it remained on the tracks. Unfortunately, the crane was thrown into the path of an oncoming passenger train, operated by NS VIRM unit 9405, which was travelling at 137 km/h (85 mph).

With only minutes separating the two collisions, there was little time to prevent disaster. The passenger train, unable to stop in time, hit the crane at full speed, resulting in all four of its vehicles being derailed. Emergency services were immediately called to the scene, and a “Code 50” alert was issued, indicating that more than 50 people were presumed injured. A GRIP 3 situation was also declared, highlighting the widespread impact of the incident on the surrounding community.

## Casualties and the Human Toll

Tragically, the operator of the crane, an employee of Royal BAM Group, was killed in the collision. Thirty people on board the passenger train sustained injuries, with fifteen of them classified as serious. Nineteen individuals were rushed to nearby hospitals, and by midday, ten had been discharged. Three of the most severely injured were placed in intensive care units, with two at Leiden University Medical Center and one at HMC Westeinde.

Despite the severity of the crash, both the freight train driver and the passenger train driver survived. The freight train driver emerged unscathed, while the passenger train driver suffered several broken bones but was expected to recover. Two conductors on the passenger train were also injured, adding to the mounting list of those affected by the tragedy.

## Investigating the Cause

In the immediate aftermath of the incident, the Dutch Safety Board (OVV) launched an investigation. The central focus was whether the crane had been placed on the correct track and if the freight and passenger trains should have been operating on lines scheduled for maintenance. The Dutch Police, along with other regulatory bodies such as the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate and

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the Labour Inspectorate, began their own investigation, working closely with ProRail, DB Cargo, NS, and Royal BAM Group.

As ProRail CEO John Voppen noted, initial reports indicated that the freight train had been on the correct track at the time of the crash. However, further investigations revealed a critical oversight: the crane had arrived at the site earlier than expected, ahead of the scheduled maintenance. Permission for the crane to be placed on the track was requested at 03:23, but the operator was advised to wait ten minutes before proceeding. Tragically, by 03:29, power to the overhead catenary lines had been lost, contributing to the catastrophic sequence of events.

## **CATEGORY**

1. Netherlands

## **POST TAG**

1. Accident
2. Crane
3. DB Cargo
4. Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS)
5. NS VIRM
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