

October 25, 2022

SEPTA RESPONDS TO “SLIPPERY RAIL” SEASON

Gel Train Performing Overnight Cleaning Through Early December to Make Tracks Safe for Service

Slippery rail season, which typically runs from late October through mid-December, is a condition that occurs when falling leaves, crushed by passing rail vehicles, deposit a residue on the tracks. This coating decreases the friction of a train’s wheels, creating slippery rails. When this happens, travel speeds are reduced to maintain safe operations, especially on inclines and declines, and when vehicles approach station platform areas.

SEPTA takes a proactive approach to addressing this operational safety challenge, utilizing a special Gel train that uses a combination of water and gel to remove oily deposits from the tracks, and crews use high-pressure washing equipment to remove leaves and their residue. In addition, sand is spread on the tracks to help increase traction.

Crews began cleaning the tracks throughout the Regional Rail network this week – including on the restored section of track between Elwyn and Wawa – and will continue working nightly through early December.

What this means for residents:

To perform this safety critical work, SEPTA crews use a diesel-powered train with specialized, high-pressure washers that clean the tracks and equipment that applies the gel. This work is performed overnight – after the end of the service day – to prevent any disruption to Regional Rail service. The diesel train and cleaning operation are louder than normal SEPTA service, and residents may hear this operation as the train passes.

What this means for customers:

The Gel train is effective at removing most of the leaves and oil from the track; however, leaves fall throughout the day and can create slick spots that delay service. Customers are advised that service delays are possible and are reminded to be alert at stations where breaking trains can slide entering stations.

Thank you for your patience and understanding as SEPTA works to make Regional Rail service safe and reliable in response to slippery rail conditions.