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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

Fall Foliage Leaves Slippery Conditions on Staten Island Railway

Crushed Leaf Residue Means More Vigilance and Track Maintenance

For MTA Staten Island Railway and other MTA commuter lines that operate outside, autumn means fallen leaves on tracks – and an operating condition known as slippery rail.

Unlike New York City Transit (NYCT) subways, most of which run in tunnels or on elevated tracks above the tree line, 99 percent of the Railway operates outside in a tree-lined environment. Tree-lined tracks make a scenic commute, but when the trees shed their leaves, some land on the rails.

Trains that crush the leaves end up with oily wheels, which are the result of leaf residue coating the rails. The substance prevents rail adhesion, leading to a slippery rail condition that makes it difficult for trains to come to a stop no matter their operating speed.

“One of the benefits of living on Staten Island is how green it is compared to the rest of New York City. But those green leaves in the summer can cause problems in the fall with the lack of rail adhesion on our tracks,” said Frank Jezycki, NYCT Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Staten Island Railway. “Leaves fall in the autumn whether in good weather or during storms, so we never stop monitoring track conditions because nothing is more important than the safety of our customers.”

The Railway mitigates the effect of slippery rails with a combination of equipment, extra manpower, staff diligence and technology. From October to mid-December, a special work train runs on mainline tracks every weeknight to apply a thin layer of traction gel, which helps to increase friction between the rails and train wheels.

A diesel locomotive also makes sporadic trips to spray sand onto the running rails, and at other times, MTA workers place sand on the tracks. The sand helps alleviate the residue buildup. On weekends, a work train equipped with a high-pressure hot-water spraying system cleans the buildup off the running rails.

The Railway makes every effort to run trains as close to schedule as possible, but customers heading to St. George Ferry Terminal-bound should consider taking earlier trains to ensure a timely connection.