

SITE SAFE NEWS



MAY 2001

SITE SAFE NEWS 1

THE CONSTRUCTION SUMMIT *turning concern into action*

George McNaughton (see panel) and Ian Whittingham (see below) were among twelve victims who appeared in a moving video produced for the country's first construction 'summit'. Their stories gave a human face to the shocking accident statistics in the construction industry.

The construction summit in London on 27 February was held against the backdrop of the largest number of construction deaths for several years. In the nine months from April 2000, 92 people had died on construction sites compared with 85 over the previous 12 months, itself 25% higher than the year before.

The summit was called by John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, and Bill Callaghan, Chair of the Health and Safety Commission, to hear from the construction industry what it would be doing to meet the challenge of 'Revitalising Health and Safety' and reduce accidents and work-related ill health in the industry (see story in last edition of SSN).

The event began with the video, which graphically pointed out the real suffering behind the bald statistics. This was followed by a one-minute silence as a mark of respect for all those who had died on Britain's construction sites.

The summit provided a chance for workers in the industry to voice their concerns. A number of campaigners and trade union members lobbied outside the building to protest at the industry's appalling safety record.

See page 2 for more about the summit and news of what happens next.



After a near-fatal accident, George McNaughton will never work again

George McNaughton's 40-year career as a construction fitter literally 'dragged' to a halt in a matter of seconds...

Called to repair a crusher at the Port of Sunderland, the 62-year-old Cumbrian was pulled into it feet first after two crucial mechanical failures.

Ironically, a few weeks earlier, George had arranged with his boss to carry on working after his retirement at 65 ... that plan now just a memory as he lay in intensive care at Sunderland General Hospital where he learnt of his massive injuries. They included a broken neck (known as hangman's neck), a broken shoulder, punctured and collapsed lungs and 16 shattered ribs. George knew he was lucky to be alive - if he'd have fallen the other way, he'd have been pulled through the machine head first.

'Machines like that rev from nought to maximum in a matter of seconds and I was thrown off balance before being dragged along the conveyor towards a three or four inch gap. I managed to kick up my legs and moments later ended up in the scrap metal container.'

The crusher he was meant to repair was investigated after the accident and found to have several faults. These included a throttle which ran wide open and a faulty override button which should have switched off the engine. The company was fined £3000. After 40 years in the industry George can never work again.



Ian Whittingham (pictured with HSC Chair Bill Callaghan) is 33 years old and confined to a wheelchair following an accident at work. Find out more on page 2.

▼ Ian Whittingham also featured in a recent national HSE advertising campaign to make workers, small contractors and the self-employed more aware of the need to work safely. For more information call HSE on 0845 3019000.

▼ In the nine months up to December 2000 there were more deaths from accidents in construction than in the whole of the previous year. 86 workers died - more than in agriculture and manufacturing industries put together.

▼ Construction workers have the second highest rate of work-related illness of all occupational groups: about 7.5% of all those currently or recently working in construction reported suffering from an illness caused by their work.

Burned by cement



These horrific injuries from cement burns highlight the need for better health and safety in construction

A worker lost a leg after he suffered horrific injuries from laying a floor.

Kevan Bloomfield from Gravesend had to have his leg amputated because of serious chemical burns caused by exposure to cement.

Kevan spent a whole morning kneeling in the wet cement, with only ripped jeans and Wellington boots to protect his legs. His jeans were soaked with a mixture of cement and water.

When he finished the job he took off his jeans and found his legs had been burned by the chemicals in the cement. He could see places where the burns went right through to the bone. Kevan was taken to a specialist burns unit for treatment but doctors failed to save his right leg.

His bosses were fined £11 000 because they had not given him proper training or warned him of the risks.

HSE inspector Emma Pettit said: 'This is one of the most serious cases of cement burns reported to HSE. It should serve as a warning to everyone who works with cement that proper safety precautions are essential.'

'Workers must be provided with - and wear - clothing to protect their skin from cement, such as gloves, overalls and waterproof boots.'

The Construction Summit

what happens next?

The construction summit in February was about deeds - not just words.

In his introduction to the summit, HSC Chair Bill Callaghan emphasised the need for construction to take effective action to reverse the tide of deaths, injury and ill health suffered by construction workers. He welcomed the targets set by the industry, which included cutting accident rates by two-thirds over the next 10 years.

Speakers from organisations representing all parts of the industry, including clients, designers, contractors and workers, then told the audience about the practical things their organisations were doing to make a real difference.

Responding for the Government, John Prescott made it clear that he was looking for action, not words, and for the industry to deliver what it had promised - to turn concern into action.

What needs to happen now? The Summit was a start, but as Kevin Myers, HSE's Chief Inspector of Construction, said: *'The ultimate test of success will be whether this Summit leads to real and sustainable change. It was just the first step in getting the necessary commitment from all involved in the construction industry to improve culture and standards and drive down accidents and ill health.'*

The urgent need for action from the industry can be summed up in the words of 33-year-old Ian Whittingham, one of the people featured in the video. Ian is a roofer who broke his back in a fall and is now confined to a wheelchair. *'What I want is to stop other people from becoming victims. I want something to actually happen. Plans are fine but people need to take action, to stop and think.'*

For details of the 'Revitalising' targets agreed by the industry, and speeches and action plans from the summit, access the Working Well Together website at <http://wwt.uk.com> or <http://workingwelltogether.com>

▼ Construction workers are six times more likely to have an accident at work than the average British worker.

What do YOU think should be done to tackle health and safety in the industry? Use our letters page to make your opinion heard.

YOUR LETTERS

As a health and safety professional, I find the accident case studies in **SITE SAFE NEWS** very useful. They bring home very vividly what the results of failing to manage safety properly can be. One thing I don't understand is why you don't publish the names of companies prosecuted?

Alan Hughes, Dorset

This is a question that we are often asked. There are several reasons. Most importantly, we choose our stories to illustrate particular points, not to 'name and shame'. Every year there are several hundred prosecutions of construction industry firms for health and safety offences. Site Safe News could not possibly even list all of these, otherwise we wouldn't have room for anything else. You can get this information from the public register of prosecutions on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk. **Editor**

SITE SAFE NEWS concentrates on bad news stories. I know that the news on fatal accidents is not good at the moment, but why don't you include articles on some of the good things that the construction industry is doing?

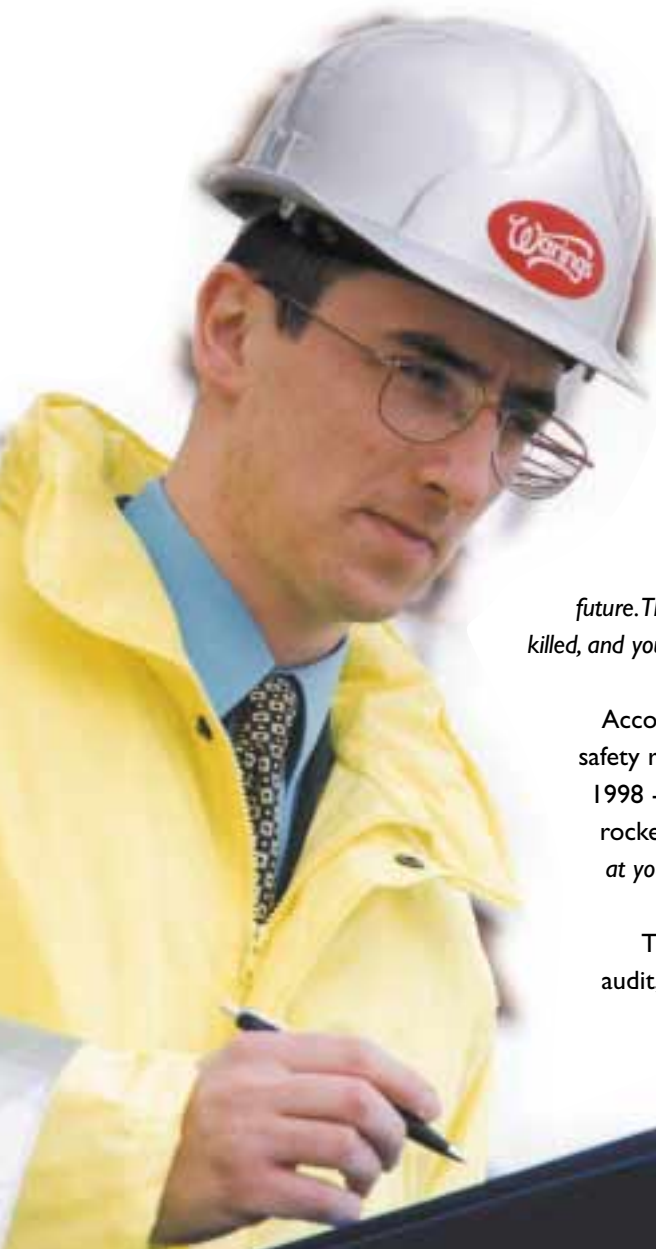
Tony Brown, Sheffield

We do try to give a balanced view. In the past, for example, we have featured several stories on initiatives that firms have taken to prevent accidents to children on site. Since the launch of the Working Well Together campaign, we have had regular WWT stories: in this edition we have an interview with the Safety Manager of the construction firm which won the top WWT award. The problem is that often good news is hard to find. So, if anyone out there has a good news story about what you, your company or your organisation are doing to improve health and safety, please let us know. **Editor**

As part of our new-look **SITE SAFE NEWS** we are now publishing readers' letters. If you have views on anything published in **SITE SAFE NEWS** - or about construction safety in general - write to the Editor, Site Safe News, Health & Safety Executive, Room 306, Daniel House, Trinity Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3TW.

Taking the safety message seriously

Some companies are tackling safety on site effectively. One contractor used the Working Well Together campaign to help them do it - your company could do the same.



Involving everyone in health and safety makes you a winner. That's what Warings Contractors Ltd found out at the Working Well Together Awards. The Portsmouth-based regional contracting company won the top award, the Silver Helmet for commitment.

Adrian Knight, Warings' Group Health and Safety Manager, puts their success down to targeting everyone in the company. *'Things happen because of people's behaviour. We questioned behaviour and attitudes at every level, from designers to site staff.'*

'We got involved with Working Well Together because we saw the future. There has to be a step change. There are too many people getting killed, and you have to do something. You have to do everything you can.'

According to Adrian, Warings have always had a 'pretty good' safety record but, he says, *'we have our ghosts'*. A fatal accident in 1998 - which went to the Crown Court the following year - rocked the company. *'It was a terrible time for us. You have to look at yourself in the mirror. You have to ask, have you done enough?'*

The company put together an action plan, based on a safety audit, which became Project RESCUE - it stands for 'Re-establishing Safety through Continued

'You have to do everything you can' says Adrian Knight.

photo: Matthew Stretten Photography Ltd.

Understanding and Education'. It's a systematic way of looking at safety, aimed at constant improvement - they're currently on the fourth version, with RESCUE 5 due in the autumn. *'Working Well Together helped to focus our energy,'* explains Adrian. And it involved everyone from the directors to the workforce.

Site staff, says Adrian, are more likely to take the safety message seriously than middle management. *'They see the blood on the slab.'* And some of the best ideas are coming from the workers. *'We consult with the lads on safety problems. And they challenge us too - they come up with ideas and say "Why don't you do it?"'*

One simple idea was to paint the top two rungs of stepladders with red paint, creating a no-go area. If someone goes into the red zone, that means danger.

And taking risks is a no-go area, too. *'Acting safely becomes the norm for everyone. People become their own safety officer.'*

Adrian's top safety tips
Use common sense
Don't walk by

Working Well Together (WWT) is an industry-wide construction health and safety campaign developed by the HSC's Construction Industry Advisory Committee (CONIAC). BNFL Engineering, Purac Ltd and Kier Southern were also winners at the first WWT national awards.

Why don't you and your company get involved in the Working Well Together campaign? To find out how you can join, visit the WWT website at <http://wwt.uk.com>, or contact the WWT helpline on 0845 27 27 500.

FOCUS ON

workplace transport

Every year about 65 people are killed in workplace transport accidents - and there are also more than 1300 major injuries. In construction, there are around 15 deaths and more than 600 injuries, with 11% of fatal accidents in construction caused by transport.

Usually these accidents are caused by unsafe systems of work. **Most of them can be avoided.**

FRACTURED

A construction worker's shoulder was crushed so badly in an accident at work that he was still off sick two years later.

The accident happened during road surfacing on the new A1 in Cambridgeshire. Worker Simon Phillips, 32, was filling in cracks in the road when he was run over by a reversing tipper truck weighing 20 tonnes.

The lorry from an asphalt plant arrived to drop materials but wasn't able to turn round. The driver tried to reverse over the bridge and knocked Simon over. Lying on the ground winded, Simon got caught in the wheels of the lorry's two rear axles. The driver only stopped when he heard Simon screaming.

The contractors on the job were fined £75 000 plus £55 000 costs. The fine was this high because a month before the accident this national company had been convicted for another reversing accident when a worker was actually killed.

AMPUTATED

A man had to have his leg amputated after another accident involving a reversing vehicle.

Paul Richardson, 36, was run over by a chipper spreader while working on resurfacing work in Cambridgeshire.

Paul was acting as a banksman for the tipper lorry when the accident happened. As the chipper driver got ready to reverse he looked round and thought Paul was standing clear. But when he started reversing he felt a bump and heard a shout. He drove forward, got down and saw Paul lying on the road.

The chipper had a central mirror but no wing mirrors. On both sides the area between the axles was a blind spot for the driver.

The manufacturers had not fitted any mirrors. The company supplying the chipper only fitted a central mirror when the contractors insisted on it, and the chargehand did not check whether the chipper had any mirrors fitted.

The three companies involved - Paul's employer, and both the supplier and the manufacturer of the chipper spreader - were all prosecuted. They were fined a total of £120 000 at Peterborough Crown Court. The judge said the accident was the fault of all three companies and could have been avoided.

HSE inspector Trevor Tollervey said: 'I am sure the size of the fine will send a clear message to all construction companies that they cannot afford to ignore safety'.

Nearly a quarter of all deaths involving vehicles at work happen while vehicles are reversing. Most of these accidents happen at low speeds and they can be avoided by taking simple precautions (see checklist on right).

▼ Deaths as a result of accidents in the construction industry went up in 2000 and 2001, taking us back to levels not seen since the early '90s

KILLED

A bricklayer's labourer was killed when he was hit by a telescopic handler weighing six and a half tonnes.



This truck was used for general transport when it should only have been used for moving materials

This site was badly organised and machines and men all had to use the same site roadway

Terry James was working on a development in Dorset when the accident happened.

He was working on his own, mixing cement, while his workmates had gone for lunch. While he had his own lunch, he kept checking the mixer, crossing the road from his car every time.

The site driver was using the telescopic handler to move from the site offices down the road to the showhouse. On his way back he saw Terry lying in the road. He did not even know he had hit him - the driver's vision was impaired on the right-hand side by the mast on the telescopic handler.

The site contractor - a subsidiary of one of the top house builders in the country - was fined £35 000 for four offences plus over £15 000 costs.

HSE Construction Inspector Jim Pride said: 'The site was very poorly organised with no way of segregating pedestrians and traffic. And the telescopic handler, which is supposed to be for moving materials, was wholly unsuitable for general transport around the site'.

You can find more information in the HSE publication *The safe use of vehicles on construction sites* (ISBN 0 7176 1610 X, price £7.95).



Reversing safely

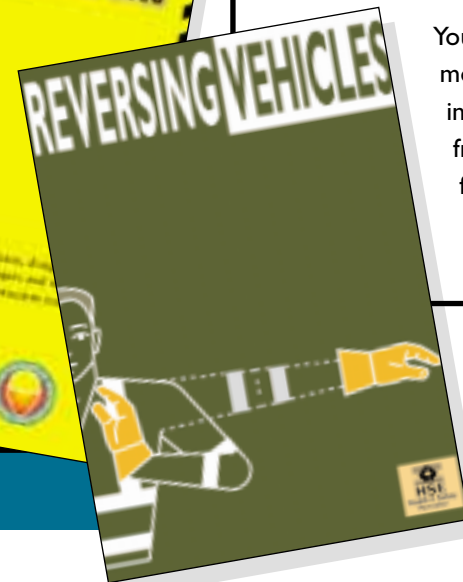
action checklist

- ▼ Remove the need for reversing
- ▼ Keep people away from the reversing area
- ▼ Minimise the distance vehicles have to reverse
- ▼ Make sure staff are trained
- ▼ Use a trained banksman or guide
- ▼ Brief all visiting drivers
- ▼ Supervise all vehicle manoeuvres properly
- ▼ Make sure the driver has adequate visibility
- ▼ Fit a reversing alarm
- ▼ Use other safety devices such as barriers or trip devices

You can get more information from HSE's free leaflet **Reversing Vehicles**.



This chipper spreader reversed over a worker, who lost his leg in the accident



Tragic fall

A roof worker was killed after falling through a fragile roof panel at a garage in Chester.

Over 50% of fatal injuries to roofers are falls through fragile materials and over 30% are falls from edges and openings.

Mick Costello, 63, was helping a workmate doing minor roof repairs on the offices and garage of a car hire firm. The roof panels were made of corrugated asbestos cement sheets, which are very

fragile. While he was working on the roof panels, Mick stood on one, which gave way. He fell over 6 metres and landed on the floor of the garage workshop next door. He died of massive head injuries and was pronounced dead at the scene.

He landed just 1½ metres from where a 17-year-old apprentice mechanic had been standing. If the mechanic hadn't heard the sound of the breaking panel, he could also have been injured.

The car hire firm should have made sure their subcontractors were working safely and that there was no-one underneath the roof while the work was going on.

The company had already been visited by an environmental health inspector from Chester City Council, who told them they had to have a risk assessment and written safety policy. They had not done this, and when the accident happened they had no-one in charge of health and safety. They were fined £5000, plus £5000 costs.

HSE inspector Neil Jamieson said: 'I have investigated many accidents involving falls from height. In nearly all cases the accident victim has sustained a major injury of some kind, including broken limbs, paralysis and brain damage.

Some have died from their injuries. It has been my experience that all the accidents were not only preventable but foreseeable. In most cases, poor planning, foresight and inappropriate use of equipment were the main causes. Others have simply taken unacceptable risks.'



Sun protection

Sun protection is a new leaflet from HSE aimed at employers of outside workers. It explains why UV radiation should be considered an occupational hazard for people who work outdoors, and gives advice on reducing the health risks for employees when they are working in the sun.

Copies of the leaflet are enclosed with this issue of **SITE SAFE NEWS**. You can get further copies from HSE Books (see address on this page).



Safe working at heights

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) are holding a conference on 'Safe working at heights' in Glasgow on 17 May 2001. You can find more details by visiting the Events page at www.iosh.co.uk or by contacting Kate Pallett, tel: 0116 257 3100; e-mail: kate.pallett@iosh.co.uk

▼ There are around 700 deaths every year among construction workers from previous exposure to asbestos.

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How to CONTACT

SITE SAFE NEWS

Letters and items of interest for Site Safe News should be sent to The Editor, **SITE SAFE NEWS**, Health & Safety Executive, Room 306, Daniel House, Trinity Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3TW.

Health and Safety queries can be answered by HSE Information Services. You can either write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG, or phone 08701 545000 or e-mail on hseinformationservices@natbrit.com and they will answer your questions. The HSE website is at www.hse.gov.uk

To avoid danger to the workers -

- ▼ The work should have been done by using crawling boards or roof ladders to work on the fragile roof.

To avoid danger to other people -

- ▼ The work should have been done at the weekend, or
- ▼ There should have been exclusion zones and site rules to keep people away from the area under the roof.

More information on roof work is available in the HSE leaflet *Health and safety in roofwork*

▼ Construction workers take the highest number of days off work because of an illness caused by work. In a single year, construction workers took around 2 million days off work as a result of work-related illness.

Please Help !!!

We're trying to find out what causes construction accidents.

We are carrying out a three year project to help find out what causes accidents so that more can be done to prevent them.

We need detailed information about 100 accidents. We'll need to talk to those involved in total confidence - all information gathered will be anonymised so that no individuals or companies can be identified.

Please contact us and we'll tell you more about the project and answer any questions.

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Mastclimber fall

Construction worker Roy Jackson was lucky to escape with serious head injuries when he was hit by a panel falling eleven floors.

The accident happened when a side panel from the mastclimber platform was dislodged. It fell from the 11th floor to the ground, snagging temporary scaffolding as it fell, and hit Roy.

There was an exclusion zone under the mastclimber but there were often unauthorised people in the area when the mastclimber was being used.

Four companies were involved in the job. Two major construction companies had formed a joint venture for the development. They subcontracted another company to do the architectural steelwork and glazing, and these had contracted a plant hire company to put up the mastclimber.

The four companies were all prosecuted and were fined a total of £45 000, plus costs.

▼ The commonest cause of work-related ill health in construction is musculo-skeletal disorder, with 62 000 people suffering from back injury in a single year.

