

SITE SAFE NEWS

AUTUMN 2001 SITE SAFE NEWS 2



INSPECTORS BLITZ CAMDEN

HSE inspectors stopped unsafe working at building sites in Camden following a two-day construction blitz in July.

Inspectors visited 44 sites and served 12 Prohibition Notices. Work was stopped for issues such as

- ▼ lack of protection at height;
- ▼ inadequate fire precautions; and
- ▼ unsafe erection of tower scaffolds.

Five inspectors arrived at sites unannounced, concentrating on both large and small sites in the Kings Cross, Euston, Tottenham Court Road, Bloomsbury, and Camden Town areas.

Andrew Beal, the inspector covering the Euston and Kings Cross area of Camden during the blitz, said: 'We were disappointed with health and safety standards on many of the sites we visited, as you can see by the number of notices served. But there were a few sites where contractors had put thought and effort into achieving adequate health and safety standards.'

Between April and September last year, there were ten deaths on construction sites in London. HSE identified Camden as a borough with a lot of construction activity at the moment.

Last October, a 46-year-old heating engineer working in Camden, was killed when he fell from a landing into a stairwell. This type of accident can often be prevented with better safety knowledge, judgement, and simple long established precautions.

HSE's inspector organising the blitz, Michael La Rose, said: 'HSE are determined to improve standards on sites in London. We will not hesitate to take firm enforcement action against those who flout safety law.'

Stop and think

The Spring issue of Site Safe News featured February's Construction Summit, aimed at putting safety at the top of the industry's agenda.

We included an article about former roofer Ian Whittingham, who is campaigning for site safety following an accident which left him in a wheelchair. Ian also featured in a recent advert which you may have seen in the Daily Mirror (Daily Record in Scotland), Sun and Daily Star.

The advertising campaign by the Health and Safety Executive is aimed at individual workers. They might be working on large sites or on smaller jobs where they could be responsible for controlling risks.

Anyone responding to the advert was sent a site health and safety checklist, which lists some of the most common hazards on construction sites.

Kevin Myers, HSE's Chief Inspector of Construction, said: 'I want workers to stop and think about the risks they take and make safety their priority.'

'Over 4000 workers are seriously injured or killed every year in the construction industry and many more suffer damage to their health. Workers should not take unnecessary risks on site. They should either remove the risks - if they control them - or report them to their supervisor where they don't.'

'We all need to work together to make sure that in future we see a significant reduction in the number of people who are killed or injured on construction sites.'

Vibration white finger can cause permanent disability



This unprotected gap in a floor was one example of failure to prevent the risk of falls from height which led to work being stopped at this site in Camden.



Work was also stopped at this site, because of a failure to provide adequate edge protection on the inside of this scaffold

Avoiding vibration white finger

HSE is campaigning to get employers to think about the health risks from vibration caused by power tools. Hand arm vibration (HAV) is a particular problem for workers in construction.

Around two thirds of all construction workers use vibrating tools. HSE estimates that about a third are exposed to levels of hand arm vibration greater than the action level which requires employers to do something to reduce that exposure.

Long-term exposure to HAV from using hand-held power tools such as concrete breakers or angle grinders causes a range of diseases. The best known of these is vibration white finger. This causes parts of the fingers to go white and numb and a loss of touch. These diseases can cause permanent disability even after only a few years of uncontrolled exposure.

There are many ways of reducing the risk to workers from HAV. First, you can avoid the risk altogether, for example by using mechanical jaws or 'crunchers', or hydraulic bursters to remove pile heads, instead of hand-held concrete breakers.

Where this can't be done, employers should make sure that they assess and manage risks from HAV properly. One way to reduce the risk is to choose carefully when buying or hiring hand-held power tools, because of the health risks from vibration.

To help employers, HSE has published a new leaflet containing straightforward guidance on how to make the best choice. The new leaflet is called *Power tools: how to reduce vibration health risks* and is available from HSE Books.

HSE inspectors will also be visiting employers where hand-held power tools are heavily used. They will look at how the risks are being managed and at company

policies for tool replacement. Inspectors will also be visiting the companies who manufacture and supply power tools, to discuss how best they can help their customers with useful information about vibration risks.

The new leaflet *Power tools: how to reduce vibration health risks* is available as free single copies or in priced packs of 15. You can get it from HSE Books (see address on back page), or from bookshops.



Vibration white finger can cause permanent disability

Ask SITE SAFE NEWS

we start a new series answering your questions on health and safety

HSE's Infoline answers questions about health and safety. This is one of the top ten questions they are asked:

Q: *Do I need to wear a safety harness when working at height?*

A: *Harnesses should not be the automatic choice to prevent falls, because it is not always easy to find somewhere to clip them onto.*

You should always try to avoid working at height. But if you have to, use a working platform with a handrail or a mobile elevating work platform. If this is not possible, try using nets or other soft landing systems. Only use a harness if these don't work, but remember: you must know how to wear it correctly.

You must also have anchor points that are strong enough and a method of rescue in case you fall and are left dangling in space. And remember, harnesses will not work if the fall height is so small that the harness and lanyard cannot deploy before you hit the ground!

Harnesses should be worn with a shock absorbing lanyard or inertia reel to reduce the risk of injury from shock loading, if you fall. Like any other safety equipment, harnesses must always be checked for wear and tear - you should never wear one if it is worn away or cut.

If you have any questions about construction site safety, write to us at:

SITE SAFE NEWS, Health & Safety Executive, Room 306, Daniel House, Trinity Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3TW. We will try to include them in future issues.

You can also ring HSE's Infoline on: 08701 545500

▼ In 1999/2000, 85 people were killed on construction sites, 5040 suffered major injuries and 10 292 had over-three-day injuries.

▼ In 2000/2001, 106 people were killed on construction sites and 4729 suffered major injuries. 9920 had injuries which kept them away from work for more than three days.

Corporate manslaughter charge

A construction company has been convicted of corporate manslaughter after one of their workers was killed.

Gang foreman Bill Larkman fell eight metres through fragile insulation material while erecting an onion store on a farm in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.

His bosses were fined £30 000, plus costs, after pleading guilty to separate charges of corporate manslaughter and breaching health and safety law.

HSE Principal Inspector Philip Poynter said: 'This verdict gives a signal to all construction companies and their directors that construction work, especially roofwork, is very high risk. It requires stringent control if we are to reduce the rising trend in the number of fatal injuries in the construction industry.'

'Companies and their directors in overall control of construction work, both large and small, have a strict legal duty to ensure that contractors working for them have the correct precautions in place and are properly supervised.'

'The industry has to change its culture to one where all parties take their responsibilities more seriously and look out for each other.'



A fatal fall from the roof of this onion shed resulted in a corporate manslaughter charge.

YOUR LETTERS

In the last issue of **SITE SAFE NEWS** we asked for your ideas to make construction sites safer. Here are some of the letters we received.

May I compliment you on Site Safe News - good straight talking on down to earth site problems.

You asked for good ideas in construction. We use a device for making ladders safe at the end of a day's work, without the upheaval of taking down and removing to compound, then taking out and erecting the next day. The security ladder lock is easily fixed at the end of the working day and easily removed at the start of the next day. It renders the ladders inaccessible during periods when trespassing children find themselves in the area or if any other person should enter illegally.

Stan Harper, Walsall

Could it be a requirement that a site must display its Health and Safety credentials in some way?

Something akin to a vehicle road fund tax disc that must be displayed publicly while work is in progress?

Charles Barraball, MRICS MCIH, Assistant Diocesan Surveyor, Diocese of Southwark

Send your letters to: **SITE SAFE NEWS**, Health & Safety Executive, Room 306, Daniel House, Trinity Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3TW.

Mastclimbers Ltd

The previous issue of Site Safe News (Spring 2001) carried an article titled 'Mastclimber fall'. This article used the trademark name 'mastclimber' to describe a mast climbing work platform.

We would like to make it clear that the specialist contractor Mastclimbers Ltd was in no way involved with the incident quoted in the article. We would like to apologise to the company for any misleading impression this article may have given.

Shattered life

A customer at a petrol station was almost killed when a kiosk roof fell onto him.

Thirty-year-old Colin Dawson called at the garage on a bank holiday to fill his car. It was a local rural garage and had an old-fashioned forecourt with a central kiosk.

Customers could not tell that the garage owners were in the middle of making alterations to the forecourt. A group of men were in the kiosk, getting ready to push the roof off.

Colin was only 4 -5 feet away when the roof came off and struck him on the head. He ended up with the top of his skull removed, part of his brain removed, and a badly shattered leg. So far he has had to have eight operations.

He has not been back at work and can't follow his hobby of mountain-climbing any more.

The garage owner and his wife/business partner both refused to accept that they had any responsibility - they blamed the builder, and even the victim, who they said should have seen what was happening and kept out of the way. They have both said that the law is wrong, although they did plead guilty and were fined £4 500 each plus costs.

HSE inspector Ron Boyd said: 'There were simple measures which could have been taken to avoid the accident. They should have waited until the customer was finished. There were plenty of cones about, which could have been used to cordon off the work area. These measures would have cost nothing, they'd have been effective, and no-one would have been hurt.'

You can find more information on keeping the public safe in the HSE booklet *Protecting the public - your next move*.

STOP PRESS

FOCUS ON asbestos

NEW GUIDANCE ON ASBESTOS

HSE has published two guidance booklets to help make sure building maintenance work involving asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) is done safely and legally.

Introduction to Asbestos Essentials is aimed at anyone who might be controlling or carrying out maintenance work with ACMs. That includes employers, contract managers and site agents - but it also means safety representatives and self-employed contractors. It covers the laws on working with asbestos and information on gauging risk, site procedures and staff training.

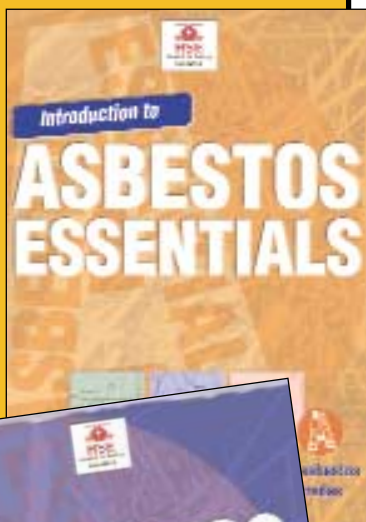
Asbestos Essentials Task Manual is aimed at workers - anyone who is likely to come into contact with asbestos during the course of their work. That includes plumbers, electricians, computer installers, telecommunications engineers and the like.

It explains how asbestos can affect the body and how you can best protect yourself. The booklet is designed to be taken on site. It includes task sheets focussed on different trades and others describing the equipment and working methods you need to know about.

Damian Stear from HSE, who wrote the booklets, said: 'People can't be exposed to asbestos fibres unless the material containing the asbestos is disturbed in some way. But if the material is drilled, cut or disturbed, fibres will be released and workers will be put at risk. This is an issue that must be taken seriously by everyone connected with maintenance work - however small the job is'.

Introduction to asbestos essentials (ISBN 0 7176 1901 X, price £12.50)

Asbestos essentials task manual (ISBN 0 7176 1887 0, price £8.50)



When working with asbestos, you may need to segregate the work area.

Ask SITE SAFE NEWS

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HSE's Infoline answers questions about health and safety.

This is one of the top ten questions they are asked most often:

Q. How do I remove asbestos cement?

A: There are many laws covering work with asbestos. Among other things, your boss is required to give you proper information and training. They must provide protective clothing and, if your exposure is likely to be above certain limits, respiratory protective equipment (RPE). They also need to provide washing and changing facilities, and to monitor your exposure and keep records.

There are things you can do to stop asbestos spreading and keep down your exposure:

- ▼ If possible, remove the asbestos cement before the rest of the building is demolished.
- ▼ If possible, avoid breaking the sheets any further.
- ▼ Keep the material wet when working on it.
- ▼ If possible, lower the material onto a clean hard surface.

▼ Remove waste and debris from the site as soon as possible to prevent it being crushed underfoot or by moving vehicles.

▼ Do not bulldoze broken asbestos cement or sheet into piles.

▼ Do not dry sweep asbestos cement debris.

▼ Dispose of the waste and debris safely.

Manual dismantling

▼ If asbestos cement sheets are in good condition, you should take them down whole.

▼ It is best to remove roof sheets from underneath with mobile elevating work platforms like scissor lifts or cherry pickers. Don't drop or damage the sheets.

▼ The best way to dispose of sheets is by transferring them to covered lorries or skips, or wrapping them intact in polythene sheeting.

Remote dismantling

▼ Remote demolition techniques such as deliberate controlled collapse can be safer than manual dismantling.

▼ The work area must be continually sprayed with water to stop asbestos fibres from spreading.

▼ The roof sheeting should be

broken into the building in a controlled manner onto the floor or hardstanding, for instance by using excavators fitted with demolition attachments. Before, and while loading the broken sheeting into lorries, you should keep it damp by spraying with water. The lorries should be securely sheeted over to prevent the asbestos waste drying out on its way to the tip.

You can find more details in the HSE guidance booklet 'Working with asbestos cement'.

Finally...remember asbestos cement is fragile, and you must not walk on it. You can't rely on it to support the weight of a person, even with new sheets. Remember the story titled 'Tragic Fall' in the last issue of **SITE SAFE NEWS**.

See page 2 for more on 'Ask **SITE SAFE NEWS**'.

The hidden killer

Asbestos fibres were released into the air for nearly seven hours during a demolition job. They covered two men and put over a hundred factory workers at risk. No-one involved in the job realised that it was asbestos.

A steel chimney at a factory in Birkenhead was being demolished. It had been lowered to the ground and steeplejacks Barry Done and Richard Thompson were cutting it up. Barry started stripping away the steel cladding, sending clouds of dust into the air. The wind sent the dust blowing around the site and into the factory.

It covered the two men - who had no respiratory protection or protective clothing. When Barry went into the factory he left a trail of white footprints on the storeroom floor.

Still no-one realised that the dust was asbestos - even the contractor's safety advisor told the men not to worry.

When Barry and Richard started work the following week they asked their contracts manager to get the chimney lagging analysed. It was found to contain crocidolite and amosite (blue and brown asbestos).

The contractors were prosecuted for failing to train their employees to recognise asbestos and were fined £40 000.

The judge said that although there were no injuries now, there could be serious consequences for the two men in the future.

You can get advice on working with asbestos in the HSE pocket card *Asbestos alert for building maintenance, repair and refurbishment workers*.

What you should do

- ▼ Ask if there has been a check for asbestos where you are working
- ▼ If not, treat any insulation or insulating board as asbestos
- ▼ If you're not sure what to do, stop work and get advice
- ▼ Use the safe work methods and equipment your boss provides
- ▼ Prevent asbestos dust being released

▼ Around one quarter of asbestos deaths happen in the building and maintenance trades. If you do maintenance, repair or refurbishment work on older buildings, you could be at risk from asbestos dust.

▼ It can take 15-60 years after being exposed to asbestos before you get ill.

▼ Asbestos-related diseases account for over 3000 deaths a year in the UK.

Safety awards

Woolworths have awarded their first annual contractors safety awards. Sponsored by Eurosafe, the awards go to the top rating principal contractors on Woolworths sites in 2000 and to the best performing site manager.

Contractors were judged on a variety of topics including safety legislation, site practices, cleanliness and standards of welfare.

Essex-based Kirkman and Jourdain won safety contractor of the year, and their site manager Denny Lawlor Junior won the site manager's award.

▼ Around 50 000 people have died from mesothelioma and other asbestos-related conditions since 1968.

▼ There is no cure once you contract asbestosis, mesothelioma or an asbestos-induced lung cancer.

Unsafe scaffolding



A family firm in Basingstoke was fined £10 000 for using unsafe scaffolding.

The magistrate said the scaffolding fell well below legal standards and it was lucky that no-one was killed.

The company were building two bungalows and were ahead of schedule. They were waiting for the correct scaffolding but decided to start work on the chimney before it arrived. Two subcontracted bricklayers built the scaffold, but just did the minimum to get them to the right height to do the job.

An HSE inspector passing the building site noticed that the scaffolding was inadequate. It had no guardrails or toeboards and the bricklayers could have fallen around 4 metres.

The company had been pulled up by HSE before. There had been a prohibition notice on them a year earlier, and an improvement notice two weeks before this incident.



Skills cards

Shepherd has become the first construction company to gain the industry's new skills cards for site supervisors and managers. 36 of their managers were awarded the skills cards this summer.

To get the new CSCS skills card you are tested on your knowledge of safety, health and accident prevention. Then you are assessed on how competent you are in your job. Supervisors get a gold card, site managers get platinum and construction contracts managers get a black card. How would you do? Here are some sample questions from the safety skills test.

▼ *How would you recognise a hazardous substance?*

- A By a symbol on its container
- B By its smell
- C It will be in a metal container
- D The colour of the label on the container

Correct answer is A

▼ *Which of the following accounts for the most accidents per year on construction sites?*

- A Trench collapses
- B Slips, trips and falls
- C Electrocution
- D Hits by vehicles

Correct answer is B

▼ *An employee has a fall and is obviously unconscious. What is the first thing you should do?*

- A Put them in the recovery position
- B Send someone for the first aider
- C Try and protect them from further injury
- D Find out if there are any witnesses

Correct answer is B

Dickensian welfare

A construction site in London's Park Lane had Dickensian welfare facilities, according to an HSE inspector.

Inspector Barry Mullen went to the site - a refurbishment of a residential block - after a mother complained that her 18-year-old son was working in dangerous conditions.

He found there was no edge protection to stop people falling from height. There was an open lift shaft and an open access hole, both in areas close to where people were working or passing by.

He also inspected the welfare facilities. There were about 15 men working on site and there was only one toilet - but it had been disconnected for three weeks. The room was totally unlit and he had to hold his breath because of the smell.

Mr Mullen said: 'The welfare facilities were among the worst I have ever come across on a construction site, and to call them Dickensian would be paying them a compliment'.

He served a Prohibition Notice closing down the site, and the property developers were prosecuted. They were fined £4500 for lack of adequate edge protection and £2000 for lack of adequate toilets, plus costs.

Absolutely essential toolkit



HSE has just published *The absolutely essential health and safety toolkit for the smaller construction contractor*.

The toolkit includes a site health and safety checklist and also tells you where to get more detailed advice.

Kevin Myers, HM Chief Inspector of Construction, says: 'The unacceptably high

levels of injuries and ill health in construction can be reduced by simple precautions. We need to show respect for the workers on construction sites by providing decent working conditions and reducing the risk of them going home injured or maimed by their work - or worse, unable to go home at all.

'If we all work together we can make the construction industry a healthier and safer place in which to work.'

Engulfed in flames

A worker was engulfed in flames while doing refurbishment work at a factory. He was lucky to escape with minor burns.

David Lloyd was working at a medical manufacturer in Hull when the accident happened. He was using a hand-held angle grinder to cut through a section of pipework when the liquid inside suddenly ignited.

Flames shot out from the bottom of the duct covering him from head to foot in flames. Luckily he was wearing protective clothing. He only got minor burns on his wrist while trying to put out the flames with his hand.

The pipework should have been dismantled using a tool like a spanner.

The company had not done a suitable risk assessment, and there were problems with their permit-to-work system. They were fined £20 000 - the maximum possible - and costs.

HSE inspector Brian Fotheringham said: 'The company had wrongly assumed that the pipes had not carried any flammable liquid. It is vital companies know what is inside pipework.'

HOW TO GET SITE SAFE NEWS

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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

