

SITE SAFE NEWS



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HSE BLITZES SCOTLAND

A week-long construction safety blitz across Scotland and the north of England revealed serious risks to workers' health and safety. HSE inspectors visited 444 sites - and took enforcement action to stop dangerous work at more than half of them.

Fifty-four inspectors were involved in the blitz which concentrated on falls from height, welfare and transport. They arrived unannounced at both small and large sites across Scotland and northern England.

The inspectors served 206 prohibition notices to stop unsafe working practices. They issued a further 53 improvement notices mostly for inadequate transport arrangements.

Pam Waldron, Head of Operations (Construction) Scotland and Northern England, who led the blitz, said: 'We found standards on many of the sites to be well below what we expect. I personally witnessed many examples of poor site management and lack of control of subcontractors allowing unsafe working practices. I also saw individual workers putting themselves at risk by ignoring site rules and taking shortcuts. But there were also examples of well run sites, where health and safety risks were properly controlled. We need to see much more of this.'



"I saw individual workers putting themselves at risk by ignoring site rules and taking shortcuts".



Just one example of dangerous working practices found by inspectors in Scotland

'Three quarters of the prohibition notices served dealt with the risks associated with working at height, such as lack of edge protection, working near roof openings, steel erection and unsafe scaffolding. As falls from height are the cause of nearly half the construction fatalities, it is vital that the industry does more to address this problem.'

Crushed to death

A developer was fined nearly £200 000 after a workman was crushed to death. The wealthy entrepreneur, who owned property worth £23 million, had tried to cut costs by employing a builder who had no experience of demolition.



This stone archway collapsed because demolition work was not done properly

Mark Wroe - a family man with a small child - was only 22 years old when he was killed. He was working for the developer on a building site in Halifax where an empty industrial unit was being refurbished.

Mark was helping as contractors were widening the entrance by demolishing a stone archway. As other workers were removing rows of bricks from a supporting wall, Mark and his workmate were building a tower scaffold in front of the doorway.

Suddenly the archway collapsed. A stone block weighing 200 kg fell on Mark, who died instantly from massive head injuries.

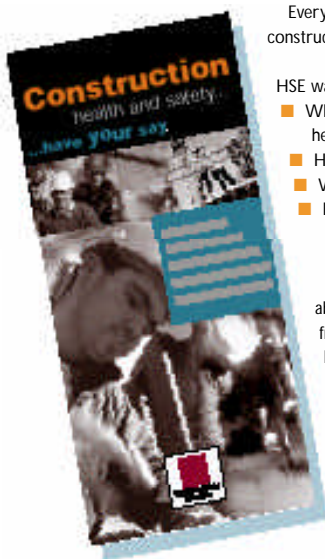
The developer, as the client on the job, was prosecuted under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations because he had failed to appoint a planning supervisor and principal contractor and had allowed work to start without a construction phase plan.

He had already been warned by HSE about the regulations after a serious accident on a different site - and, after the tragedy in Halifax, inspectors had to issue a prohibition notice on yet another of his sites.

The judge said it was a way of life for the developer to do work as cheaply and quickly as possible.

Have your say

HSE wants your views on how to improve health and safety in the construction industry.



Everyone agrees there are too many deaths and injuries in construction. What needs to happen to change this?

HSE wants to know:

- What changes would make the biggest improvement in construction health and safety?
- How would you make them happen?
- What is stopping them happening?
- How is health and safety affected by the black economy and what can be done about this?

HSE has published a discussion document to find out your views about what needs to be done. They are particularly keen to hear from self-employed builders and small firms. You should find a leaflet in this issue of *Site Safe News* with more information. You can also get a copy of the discussion document from HSE Books (see address on back page).

You can send your comments to HSE, Construction Policy (SPD C2), 5SW, Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London SE1 9HS, or by e-mailing DD.Construction@hse.gsi.gov.uk. You can even discuss the questions online - there is an Internet discussion forum at www.hse.gov.uk/disdiscs/construction.htm.

You have until the end of this year to make your views heard.

In the spring issue of *Site Safe News* we highlighted the dangers of working at height. Below, a reader responds to our article on ladders. The recent HSE blitz of construction sites in London shows how much still needs to be done. And a widow describes what it is like when it is your own husband who is killed.

NINE FIRMS FINED

Nine construction companies were fined a total of more than £28 000 following a week-long construction safety blitz in London in April and May this year. HSE prosecuted them for breaking the law governing the danger of workers falling from heights.

HSE's prosecuting inspector Barry Mullen, said: 'The blitz has sent out a significant message to the construction industry that HSE is ready to deal with the risks of falls from height in a positive and firm manner. We will not flinch from taking strong enforcement action against anyone who does not comply with health, safety and welfare laws.'



Many of London's construction sites still have poor health and safety standards

Most of the firms prosecuted have viewed the action taken against them as positive and are putting measures in place to improve safety, although the construction industry still has a long way to go.'

HSE's blitz revealed that many of the capital's construction sites still have poor health and safety working standards. Inspectors took enforcement action against almost two-thirds of the sites visited.

Inspectors visited 223 construction sites during the blitz and served 110 prohibition notices. They stopped unsafe work on nearly half the sites visited for issues such as failing to provide proper fall protection and a lack of welfare facilities. They also issued 11 improvement notices, most for inadequate welfare facilities - an important issue for safety as well as comfort because you could get ill if you can't wash off dust, dirt, solvents etc properly.

The blitz was the first of a rolling programme of inspections to be held across the country this year - the second, in May, was in Scotland and the north of England (see article on page 1).

There were 79 fatal injuries in the construction industry between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002. 37 of these involved falls from height - mostly from roofs or roof edges, ladders, scaffolds and raised platforms.



Amanda McIntosh lost her husband in a scaffolding accident

LETTERS

Using ladders

Dear SSN

Whilst much of the May edition of *SITE SAFE NEWS* was, as in previous editions, informative and helpful, could I raise concern about the article 'When is it safe to use a ladder to work from?'

St Helens Council, in common with other Local Authorities, is a major procurer of construction activities often using small and medium sized businesses. A constant area of concern involves our promotion of work platforms for works at height as opposed to the almost universal preference for ladders amongst our contractors.

Surely HSE in listing the 'Ten Golden Rules' should have as number one the requirement for a work platform to be used unless it is unreasonable to do so, ie light work/short duration, in accordance with the clear requirements of the Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1996.

The article appears to place ladders and work platforms on an equal footing when the current legal framework requires works at height to use a work platform unless it can be shown to be unreasonable to do so.

In conclusion, whilst I recognise that the article was aimed primarily at ladder safety, I believe an opportunity was missed for HSE to emphasise and clarify that a work platform should always be the first choice for work at height.

Andy Dempsey, Safety and Risk Manager, St Helens Council

Mr Dempsey is of course correct. And is complying with rule one of the 'ten golden rules' in the article: 'Is there a better, safer way to gain access to a place of work?'

Not just statistics

Kenny McIntosh was a builder with over 30 years' experience when he lost his life in a workplace accident. Kenny, from Aberdeenshire, was taking down some scaffolding on a nearby farm when he fell eight feet from a roof.

Kenny's wife Amanda tells the story in a new book from HSE, *Jobs to die for*.

'I felt numb when I heard the news. Obviously, I knew that accidents can happen in construction,

but you never think it will happen to you, or to someone you love.'

Four years after the tragic accident, Amanda has this to say about the industry which took her husband's life: 'Nothing has changed since to prevent another tragedy. The accidents haven't stopped since Kenny died. I want to see employers improve their work practices. The building trade in particular needs to take a long, hard look at itself.'

'I never knew in all the years we were married how dangerous Kenny's trade can be. The accident statistics are horrifying. And they're not just statistics - they're people's lives.'

Jobs to die for tells hard-hitting, real-life stories that bring home the human cost of accidents at work. The book also includes two other contributors from the construction industry:

- a project manager of a building site where a man died after falling from a scaffold; and
- the family of a young groundworker who died under the wheels of a reversing excavator.

HSE's Director General Timothy Walker says: 'The consequences of taking chances and cutting corners are here for you to see in the stories that those left behind have shared with us. We owe it to our families and partners to make sure that we come home from work and that we come home healthy and safe.'

Jobs to die for is available from HSE Books (see address on back page).

FOCUS ON

plant and machinery

Construction plant can be heavy. It often operates on ground which is muddy and uneven, and where visibility for the driver is poor. People walking on site can be injured or killed by moving vehicles, especially reversing ones. Others, particularly drivers and operators, can be killed or injured by overturning vehicles and plant.

In 2001/2002, there were eleven deaths in the construction industry caused by people being struck by a moving vehicle.

Ask SITE SAFE NEWS

Q. How can I control the dangers from vehicle movements on my site?

A: Vehicle movements on construction sites are a major cause of serious - and fatal - injuries. Vehicles moving close to people on foot, on noisy and busy sites, are an unsafe mix. The pedestrian will always come off worse. Reversing is a particularly dangerous activity when the driver cannot see clearly behind.

So making sure vehicles on construction sites are used safely is a key priority.

Three simple rules to help ensure safety are:

1 Segregate vehicles and pedestrians

- Create vehicle or pedestrian exclusion areas.
- Keep pedestrian routes well away from vehicle routes.
- Provide fencing to segregate pedestrians from vehicle movements.

2 Eliminate or control reversing operations

- Eliminate reversing by providing one-way systems and turning areas.

Where this is not possible due to the type of work on site, control reversing operations by implementing safe systems of work:

- Prohibit pedestrians in designated reversing areas; and
- Use CCTV cameras or extra mirrors on vehicles to improve driver vision.

Even when vehicles are fitted with CCTV you should still segregate pedestrians and vehicles, and eliminate reversing wherever possible.

3 Safe driver safe vehicle

- Drivers should be competent and properly trained for the vehicle they are driving.
- All vehicles should be properly maintained particularly safety critical parts of vehicles eg brakes, mirrors, steering.

If you follow these methods on your site, you will greatly reduce the risk from vehicles. Remember that however well you plan for safety it will only be effective if all the pedestrians and all the drivers - including visiting drivers - know the site rules and if those rules are monitored to make sure everybody is working to them.

Plant safety checklist

- Make sure loads are properly secured. Check that loose material, such as loose bricks or lumps of clay, can't fall from lorries or site dumpers and strike pedestrians.
- Make sure that passengers are only carried on vehicles designed to carry them.
- Make sure that plant and vehicles are not used on dangerous slopes.
- Make sure vehicles are not overloaded. This can make them unstable or difficult to steer and might impair their braking efficiency.
- Arrange vehicle loading and unloading areas to make sure people don't have to remain on the vehicle. If someone has to stay on the vehicle, provide a safe place for them.

IT COULD BE YOU

Six construction workers were fined after a passing HSE inspector saw them breaking the law.

The men were working on a road improvement scheme near Wrexham and inspector Hywel Williams was caught in a traffic jam caused by the same roadworks.

He spotted five men on the engine housing at the back of the mechanical digger trying to counterbalance the weight of an old road sign they were trying to handle. The road sign with its concrete base was far too heavy for the machine so the foreman decided to use the men as human ballast.

The men could easily have fallen from the machine - which was acting like a bucking bronco. And if the hydraulic system had burst they would have been catapulted from it - they were attempting to handle 1.6 tonnes when the machine had a safe working load of just 675 kg.

Instead they were taken to court. The foreman was fined £750, the driver, £600 and the four labourers £500 each. And they were each ordered to pay £80 costs.



This old road sign weighed over 1.5 tonnes - far too heavy to be lifted by this machine

Mr Williams said: 'This was nothing to do with the company - all the men had been given safety training. The workers themselves - as individuals - were legally responsible.'

'They were gobsmacked when they found out they were going to court. But people need to realise that everyone has a part to play in controlling health and safety on site.'

“ People need to realise that everyone has a part to play in controlling health and safety on site ”.

Knocked down and killed

A clerk of works was knocked down and killed when a road sweeper reversed over him. 61-year-old John McDonald died during overnight roadworks on the A82 dual carriageway in West Dumbartonshire.



A man was killed when this road sweeper reversed into him

The hired road sweeper was late arriving and the driver didn't stop for a site induction. If he had, he would have been told that site rules said that he could not reverse without using a banksman. He would also have been told that there was a one-way system on site.

The driver knew his reversing lights and siren weren't working but he didn't tell anyone. John didn't get any warning in time to move out of the way. And the driver didn't see John because there was a blind spot behind the vehicle.

The principal contractor was prosecuted for failing to have a system in place to stop vehicles being driven directly onto the site and being reversed without the aid of a banksman. They were fined £12 000. The plant hire company was also prosecuted and was fined £5 000.

The accident could have been avoided if the reversing lights and siren had been working, and if the driver had stopped for a site induction before entering the site and had used a banksman.

But the best way to stop this kind of accident is to have a one-way system so that no-one has to reverse.

Online advice

New easy-to-follow health and safety advice for the construction industry is now available on the Working Well Together (WWT) website.

The web guidance draws on material from *Health and safety in construction*, which is aimed at both large and small firms, and *The absolutely essential health and safety toolkit for the smaller construction contractor*, two of HSE's most popular publications in the construction industry.

The new online resource follows the easy-to-use structure of the pocket sized *Toolkit*, and has useful links to further information.

Simply access <http://www.uk.com> and, from the home page, go directly to 'Answers to all your health and safety questions'.

Help at hand

We don't want workplace accidents to happen. But when they do, it's useful to know there is help at hand. The Lighthouse Club is a construction industry charity which has a Benevolent Fund. This aims to help families of construction workers who are struggling because of injuries, health problems or bereavement.

The Club has 21 branches in the UK and Ireland, each with a welfare officer who can help with one-off grants or over a five-year period.

For example, the fund bought new kitchen appliances for the family of a roofer disabled in an accident, because their benefits would not stretch that far. And a young widow, who lost her husband in a construction site accident, was given financial help to see her through until she got damages through the courts.

You can contact the Lighthouse Club's Benevolent Fund Administrator, Peter Burns, on 0161 429 0022.

Asbestos in school

A local authority in Scotland was fined £50 000 after subcontractors were exposed to asbestos during the refurbishment of a school

The council's laboratory service had surveyed the school for asbestos, but failed to identify asbestos in ceiling tiles in many areas of the school.

A year-long investigation by HSE uncovered numerous failings in the asbestos laboratory, including falsified records and discrepancies in quality control.

The investigation also revealed that the Council had evidence that the survey was flawed before the refurbishment began. But they did nothing to prevent their subcontractors and employees being exposed to asbestos.

The work of the laboratory has since been suspended and the technicians involved in the survey have been dismissed.



WWT conference goes back to grassroots

This year's Working Well Together Conference takes place in Birmingham on 28 November.

Regional WWT groups will share practical ideas on how to make the construction industry safer and healthier. Robin Powell from DSM Demolition is a member of the Midlands WWT group and says: 'Much of the success of WWT is down to what has been happening at grass roots level. What we are now aiming to do with the national conference is to get people together and share those ideas across the whole country.'

'Smaller businesses are under tight pressures on their time, so we are taking a no-nonsense approach at the conference making sure that all the sessions are practical, straightforward and to the point.'

Organisers expect demand for tickets to be high, and will give first preference to WWT members.

For tickets contact June Ellis, telephone: 0151 951 4595; e-mail june.ellis@hse.gsj.gov.uk; or write to: June Ellis, WWT, Room 205, Daniel House, Trinity Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3TW.



The Working Well Together tour bus visited Scotland in August, stopping off at Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness. The bus tour gives construction workers the chance to get vital information on how they and their workmates can keep safe and healthy at work.

Not a playground

HSE has published a new children's booklet about the dangers of playing on and around construction sites.

Aimed at seven-to-eleven-year olds, *Stay safe - Building site safety*, features a cartoon character called Digger, who guides readers around a variety of games, puzzles and comic strips. The booklet encourages children to think about the hazards on building sites. It looks at different types of building site situations from new builds to demolition sites.

It also contains a pull-out poster of a building site with hazards and asks children to spot them by putting stickers in the correct places.

Many children view construction sites as playgrounds and think they are fun and safe places to play. But they are far from fun and safe. 16 children were killed in construction-related incidents over the last 10 years, and 802 were injured.

This aim of the booklet is to change attitudes and bring home to children the message that they should never go on a building site - they are dangerous places.

Mike Cosman, head of HSE's Construction Sector, said: 'Building sites act like a magnet to children who don't understand the dangers they present. It is not enough to say 'No'. Children need to have the risks explained to them in a way they can relate to.'

You can order the booklets free of charge by contacting HSE books on 01787 881165.

HOW TO GET

SITE SAFE NEWS

SITE SAFE NEWS is sent to you by HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. If your address details are incorrect or your requirements change please contact HSE Books at this address or phone 01787 881165 or fax 01787 313995. Please quote 'SITE SAFE NEWS' when contacting HSE Books.

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HOW TO CONTACT

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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. Please note we do not carry product information.

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