

Better Safety Information and Advice Needed for Firms Employing Apprentices

By SHP Online

A report has found that better advice and information is needed for employers to ensure the health and safety of their apprentices.

An inquiry into the health and safety arrangements for apprentices, launched by RoSPA's National Occupational Safety and Health Committee (NOSHC), found a dearth of safety information for companies due to a lack of data, and a misunderstanding of who a "typical" apprentice is.

Much of the safety advice currently available assumes that the apprentice will be aged 24 or under, male, and working in a manual trade, whereas a recent House of Commons paper shows that the typical apprentice is 25 or older, female, and in the service sector.

With the number of apprentices in the UK set to triple to 3 million by 2020, NOSHC will now work with multidisciplinary partnerships to extend and enhance available information.

Martin Isles, chairman of RoSPA's National Occupational Safety & Health Committee, said: "The timing of the report is particularly pertinent as it coincides with employers urging the government in Westminster to delay and re-design the levy on apprenticeships which, from April 2017, is set to transfer the cost of apprenticeships from the state onto all employers with a payroll exceeding £3m."

Dr Karen McDonnell, RoSPA's occupational safety and health policy adviser, said: "Safe and healthy work at all ages is fundamentally important – it is essential that employees at every stage of their working life are targeted with the right information at the right time.

"NOSHC believes that compiling data by age and across a range of industries, instead of conflating statistics, will be a good start.

"There is also a need for health and safety advice for those placing trainees, guidance for schools for engaging the future workforce early – including in traineeships – and targeted health-specific advice for those apprentices with disabilities."

Employers interested in working with NOSHC should contact Dr McDonnell on kmcdonnell@rospa.com.

Bulgarian Firm Fined for Poor Work at Height

A Bulgarian construction firm has been fined after a member of the public reported unsafe working practices during the construction of an adventure course in Markeaton Park, Derby.

Derby Magistrates' Court heard how a passing member of the public noticed work at height being carried out from a pallet on the forks of a telehandler at the site in Markeaton Park, where a high ropes adventure course was being constructed by Bulgarian based firm Walltopia.

The member of the public first reported this to the company but despite receiving assurances the matter would be dealt with, unsafe work at height continued. They then reported it to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

HSE's investigation at the site found work was taking place on a section of roof 11 metres off the ground, without the use of any means to prevent two workers falling from the open edges. In addition, these workers were accessing the roof by climbing from the basket of a cherry picker.

Walltopia of Bulgaria Boulevard, Letnitsa, Bulgaria, was fined £500,000 and ordered to pay costs of £8,013.25 after pleading guilty to breaching Regulation 4(1) of the Work at Height Regulations 2005.

After the case, HSE Inspector Lee Greatorex said: "Using a pallet on a telehandler for planned work at height is an unacceptable means of access. It appears that the company failed to put in place control measures after being alerted about this.

"Walltopia failed to follow recognised industry standards during work at height and did not make effective changes to the control of their working methods following the matter being brought to its attention. Work at height should always be sufficiently planned and managed to protect workers from being exposed to extreme risks from falls from height. In this case someone could have suffered significant injuries or death".

Updated Lone Worker Standard Released

By Roz Sanderson

An updated lone worker standard has been released, for the provision of lone worker devices and services. The British Standard BS8484 was first introduced in September 2009, and lays out requirements for lone worker devices and Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) compliance.

Ian Johannessen, managing director of Peoplesafe, was part of the British Standards Institute committee which reviewed and updated the standard. He said: "The standard has greatly improved and covers the elements that contribute to lone worker safety in a more comprehensive manner. "There are four groups that will benefit from the 2016 release: lone workers, their employers, lone worker solution providers, and escalations and emergency services."

The updated standard is said to have a more customer-focused feel. Hannah Weinhold, Peoplesafe business services manager, said: "The new standard will look more widely at how the employers of lone workers can achieve a consistently effective position on lone worker staff safety."

New standards commonly have a practical life of 3-5 years, Ian explained. He went on to state his confidence that the new updated signalled a strong new direction for lone worker safety.

"Employing staff who work alone on the frontline is a challenge, this standard will undoubtedly encourage more organisations to look carefully at safety systems and culture, and specifically their provision for lone worker safety," he said. Peoplesafe will be releasing a guidance document on the new standard in early September, when it will be available to download from SHP.

Timber-Frame Firm Fined for Fire Safety and Traffic Offences

J G Hale Construction Ltd based in South Wales has been fined £100,000 for running an unsafe timber-frame construction site.

Cwmbran Magistrates' Court heard that HSE launched an investigation on 27 July after making an unannounced visit to inspect Hale's site in the centre of Blaenavon.

Fifty-four timber-frame houses were under construction, which carry a serious fire risk if not planned or managed properly, as the structures are made from wood. If a fire starts, the speed and intensity of fire spread can be extreme – putting workers and even members of the public at risk of harm.

HSE found that measures to prevent a fire starting and getting out of control had not been properly taken. All the houses were under construction at broadly the same stage with little fire protection, a lack of site management control, insufficient means to detect a fire and raise the alarm, poor control of ignition sources and a general lack of emergency planning. Workers were also at risk of being struck or crushed by construction vehicles on site.

Improvement Notices were served regarding fire and vehicle safety issues and these were complied with after two further inspection visits.

J G Hale Construction Limited, of Milland Road, Neath, South Wales, who also manufacture timber frames for the construction industry, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulations 27 and 29 of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015, and was fined £40,000 and £60,000 respectively. They were ordered to pay full prosecution costs of £4633.76 and a statutory surcharge of £120.

After the hearing, HSE inspector Liam Osborne said: "Hale Construction had been given plenty of warnings about fire-safety and traffic risks in the recent past, including from HSE.

"Timber-frame houses are perfectly safe once they're finished and protected, but when under construction they can be very dangerous. Stringent fire-safety standards need to be in place well before the build starts, and then maintained and monitored".

Is the 9-5 Desk Job Killing You?

By Lauren Applebey

A major Lancet study, which looked at one million adults has found that sitting for at least eight hours a day could increase the risk of premature death by up to 60 per cent, the Telegraph has reported.

Now, office workers are being urged to take five minute breaks every hour, as well as exercising at lunchtime and outside of work, as the research says that just one hour's activity a day was enough to reverse the damage caused by prolonged sitting.

Scientists said sedentary lifestyles were now posing as great a threat to public health as smoking, and were causing more deaths than obesity.

Lead scientist Professor Ulf Ekelund, from Cambridge University and the Norwegian School of Sports Sciences, said: "We found that at least one hour of physical activity per day, for example brisk walking or bike cycling, eliminates the association between sitting time and death."

A decent walk – at a speed of just over three miles an hour – was enough to achieve the benefit, he stressed.

“You don’t need to do sport, you don’t need to go to the gym, it’s OK doing some brisk walking maybe in the morning, during your lunchtime, after dinner in the evening. You can split it up over the day but you need to do at least one hour,” he said.
Researchers said that:

- the typical modern lifestyle of spending a day in front of a computer, followed by an evening slumped in front of the television was proving fatal;
- whilst they could not pinpoint why long periods of sitting were specifically risky, movement appeared to assist the body’s metabolism, while sedentary periods could influence hormones such as leptin, which regulate energy balance;
- among those who sat for at least eight hours daily and managed less than five minutes’ activity mortality rates were 9.9 per cent;
- those who spent just as long seated, but managed at least an hour’s exercise, saw death rates drop to 6.2 per cent;
- cancer and heart disease were the two most likely causes of death linked to inactivity; and
- around one hour’s activity a day was enough to reverse the damage caused by prolonged sitting.

Similar results were found when the scientists looked at the television viewing habits of a subgroup of about 500,000 people. Watching TV for more than three hours per day was associated with an increased risk of death in all groups except those who managed at least an hour’s exercise.

The research, from 16 studies, is among four papers published recently in *The Lancet* ahead of the Olympic Games in Brazil. Read the full article here: www.thelancet.com

Construction Firm Sentenced after Worker Falls Down a Lift Pit

Cardiff-based construction company, Jehu Project Services Ltd, has been sentenced after a worker was seriously injured falling down a lift pit.

The incident happened on 8 July 2015 at a construction site in Pontcanna, Cardiff. Stephen Harrison, a specialist drilling contractor, was employed by Jehu to help refurbish a 73-bed care home when he fell into the basement of a lift pit that was under construction.

Mr Harrison stepped onto the ground floor having been working off a tower scaffold, but stood on a loose concrete block causing him to fall backwards, head-first, into a skip full of rubble on the floor below. A specialist Fire and Rescue team were nearby and after stabilising Mr Harrison, attached him to the hook of a tower crane and winched him out of the pit, over the site and into the carpark of a housing estate nearby where an ambulance was waiting.

Mr Harrison suffered shattered vertebrae, five broken ribs, a punctured lung and spent 18 days in hospital. He is still recovering and although not paralysed, his injuries were life-changing and he will not return to work.

HSE investigated the incident and found that Jehu had been using a system of lightweight barriers around the edges of the drop, along with bean bags at the bottom of the hole, but these were incompatible with all of the work that needed to be done by the different contractors and had been removed. Following the incident, all of the danger areas were fenced with scaffolding.

Newport Crown Court heard that there were numerous management failings associated with this project, which included a lack of effective site management and supervision, a construction plan that did not properly consider obvious working at height risks and a lack of an effective Temporary Works Management System.

Jehu Project Services Ltd pleaded guilty to breaching Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015, Regulation 13(1) and Work at Height Regulations 2005, Regulation 6(3) and was fined £143,000 and ordered to pay full costs of £15,029.30.

HSE Inspector Liam Osborne, who brought the case, said: “Jehu had been given many warnings in the past by HSE about the lack of effective planning, managing and monitoring on their construction sites, as well as warnings about unsafe working at height. The court heard some really positive steps the company are now taking to put these matters right, including making substantial management changes.

“It is crucial that construction firms properly think through the risks involved before starting work, they then need to ensure there is a workable plan to iron-out or manage the resultant dangers.

“There is a clear hierarchy for managing work at height risks, site managers need to prevent it if possible and then provide suitable fixed barriers. Lower-order measures, such as soft-landing systems or the use of harnesses should only be selected as a last resort and if it is safe and appropriate to do so”.