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HEALTH AND SAFETY NEWS

Published by **ARKSAFE LTD. Bars Hill, Costock, Leicestershire LE12 6XY Tel:01509 854394**

No.51

KEEPING YOU INFORMED ON HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUES

Winter 2009/10

IMPROVED STATISTICS SUPPORT HSE'S TOUGH LINE

Britain became a healthier and safer place to work last year, according to figures recently published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Statistics show there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of people killed, injured or suffering work related ill-health from April 2008 to March 2009.

Across England, Scotland and Wales, 29.3 million working days (equivalent to 1.24 days per worker) were lost to injury and ill health last year - compared with 33.9 million in 2007/08.

Workplace fatal injuries fell from 233 in 2007/08 to a record low of 180 in 2008/09, and there was a reduction of more than 7,000 in the number of workplace injuries classified as serious or incurring more than three days absence from work.

Comparison with international data shows Britain to be one of the safest places to work in the EU.

Judith Hackitt, Chair of HSE said:

"It is really encouraging to see these improvements in the numbers of deaths, injuries and cases of ill health at work over the last year.

Bill, Caroline and all who work with us at ARKSAFE, would like to thank you for your support in the past year and send you and your families our best wishes for Christmas and a healthy and safe 2010

"Protecting people from harm caused by work remains important, irrespective of the economic climate. Having shown that Great Britain can achieve a performance that compares favourably with other industrialised nations as we entered the global recession, the challenge now is to maintain that improvement as we move towards recovery and increased activity in some economic sectors.

"In spite of the encouraging overall statistics today, let's not forget that they tell also us a story of individuals and families who have suffered. This underlines the real risks that people can face at work every day. This is what the real health and safety agenda has always been about and it will continue to be so."

Major injuries at work have fallen since 2000 and this trend continued last year with 28,692 workers reported as being injured in 2008/09 (94.8 per 100,000) compared with 29,389 in 2007/08 (96.5 per 100,000).

A statistically significant fall was recorded in the estimated number of self-reported injuries - down from 299,000 in 2007/08 to 246,000 last year.

This improvement saw business lose 1.6 million fewer working days through all types of injury, a total of 4.7 million. The number of people estimated to be suffering from work-related ill health fell by 79,000 in 2008/09 to 1.2 million.

And as a result three million fewer working days were lost to ill health in 2008/09 - a total of 24.6 million.

Judith Hackitt added:

"The improvements shown in these statistics point to other factors than simply a reduction in activity levels in a recession. While the recession will undoubtedly have an impact, the effect is not direct and easy to explain.

"History suggests that when we start moving back into economic growth the rate of work-related injuries will tend to increase. Preventing history from repeating itself is a challenge facing everyone with a stake in health and safety in the workplace - regulators, employers and employees alike: we all need to be part of the solution."

HSE continues to take a tough line with firms who put workers at risk by breaking safety legislation. It brought 1231 offences to court in 2008/9, and issued 8054 enforcement notices.

Primary Care Trust Fined £10,000 after Patient Falls from Window

North East Essex Primary Care Trust was recently fined £10,000 and ordered to pay costs of £4,972 after a vulnerable and partially-sighted patient fell over four metres from a first floor window at Clacton & District Hospital, which the Trust operates.

The retired 68-year-old suffered a blow to the head and broke his pelvis, shoulder and coccyx in the fall in March last year. The court heard he was known to wander on the ward and had previously suffered four strokes, which had left him mentally and emotionally impaired.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted the Primary Care Trust for breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

The court heard that the patient had wandered into the ward's first floor day room and fell from an open window to the ground below.

The window was able to open 254mm, but since 1989 NHS standards have required such a window to only open to 100mm by fitting a window restrictor.

Shortly before the incident the PCT was required by the Department of Health to review its window restrictors and identify any that were missing, damaged or defective. This review was not carried out.

HSE Inspector Kim Wicks said

"North East Essex Primary Care Trust failed in its duty to ensure the health and safety of this retired gentleman, who was left severely injured after his fall, which should never have happened.

All PCTs must ensure they adhere to recognised NHS safety standards - they are there for a reason. If North East Essex PCT had done so, this unfortunate incident could have been avoided."

Warning as Britain's Asbestos Death Toll Exceeds 35,000

A new generation of workers are at risk unless building trades get to grips with Britain's biggest workplace killer.

HSE's figures show that around a quarter of the 4,000 or so people dying from asbestos-related diseases each year in Britain are tradesmen such as joiners, electricians and plumbers. About twenty lose their lives each week.

Across Britain, more than 35,000 people died from the asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma between 1977 and 2007 - and the numbers of fatalities per year are still increasing. Latest annual figures show that 2,156 people died from the disease in 2007 alone, up five per cent on the previous year.

HSE recently launched a £1.2 million, campaign to warn Britain's 1.8 million tradesmen about the dangers they face. "Asbestos: The Hidden Killer", launched in November saw more than 500,000 information packs sent out, as well as targeted press and radio adverts.

Steve Coldrick, HSE's Asbestos Programme Director, said:

"With this campaign we can educate today's workforce about the risks and what action they need to take to protect themselves from this deadly dust. If tradesmen are not sure whether there is asbestos present where they are working, they should stop and check.

"We cannot allow this hidden killer to claim another generation of tradesmen."

Asbestos may be present in any building constructed or refurbished before the year 2000, and it is estimated that around 500,000 workplace premises may contain asbestos.

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Property Developer Fined for Putting Workers at Risk

A London property developer and landlord was recently fined £10,000 at City of London Magistrates Court after workers on two of his developments were put at risk.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted Lahrie Mohamed of South Woodford, London, after uncovering breaches of health and safety law on two sites in Waltham Forest, north-east London.

Mr Mohamed was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay costs of £4,103 after pleading guilty to breaches of the Construction (Design & Management) Regulations for offences committed at 78-80 Spruce Hills Road and 67-67a Chingford Mount Road.

The court heard how Mr Mohammed failed on both sites to appoint a competent contractor and failed to take reasonable steps to ensure that proper arrangements were in place for work to be managed safely - putting workers and neighbours at risk.

Open fires were lit at the Chingford Mount Road site, which is close to a petrol station, but there were no fire extinguishers on site. Inspectors also found that scaffolding at the property was substandard or missing and had insufficient guard rails, while 240 volt power tools were used in areas where the cables were likely to be damaged, creating a risk of electrocution and fire. Domestic quality cables were also run through damp areas. HSE inspectors ordered workers to down tools after visiting the site.

HSE Construction Inspector Sarah Snelling commented:

"Mr Mohamed put the lives of the men working on his sites at serious risk by failing to appoint competent contractors to carry out and manage the work.

"As a long-standing property developer and professional landlord who owns over 100 properties in and around Waltham Forest, Mr Mohamed should have had the knowledge and resources to ensure that the work was carried out safely and legally."

Maintenance Company Fined After Employee Trapped in Machine

Businesses are being urged to take adequate precautions, after an employee sustained serious injuries when his hand became entangled in a lathe.

The Health and Safety Executive recently prosecuted I S Maintenance Limited, of Smithies in Barnsley, for breaching the Health and Safety at Work Act over the incident, which occurred in January 2008. The company was fined £10,000 with £4,085 costs at Sheffield Crown Court.

The court heard that I S Maintenance's employee, Craig Chappell, of Wombwell, had been polishing a metal component on a lathe, when his hands became caught and were pulled into the machine, which was set to rotate at 1,200 revs per minute.

Although Mr Chappell managed to free his hands from the gloves, he suffered serious injuries to his left hand, including three broken metatarsal bones, muscle damage and severe bruising, as well as muscle injuries and bruising to his right hand.

The HSE investigation revealed that the company had neither carried out the necessary risk assessments, nor had they implemented any safe systems of work to prevent such an incident. Mr Chappell had no experience of operating metal working lathes and was not given the appropriate instruction or cleaning tools to carry out the task.

After the hearing, HSE Inspector Denise Fotheringham commented:

"We found serious health and safety failings at the company, which resulted in Mr Chappell suffering severe, long-term injury to both hands. Mr Chappell is still unable to clench his left fist or lift heavy items, which has affected his career, given his background in manual work. "I hope this serves as a warning to other employers who have machinery on their premises, as they have a duty to protect their staff. Had the correct precautions been in place, this incident could have been avoided."