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RNIB simulation glasses worn at 'Is your workplace fit' Seminar

Is your workplace fit

Dave Smith from Work-Able, Dave Miller from the Pay and Employment Rights Service and Brian Marsden from Safety Management Services spoke recently at the Forum Seminar about practical risk assessments for special workers.

Dave Smith spoke about risk assessments for disabled workers. He said that people who have a disability or a long-term health condition are protected by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. Some employers have used the standpoint that people with disabilities are actually adding to health and safety risks in the workplace e.g. the deaf cannot hear the fire alarm. Dave said this stance today is not acceptable and that reasonable adjustments need to be considered. Dave went on to give examples of reasonable adjustments and he said that he is willing to visit places of work to offer his advice. Contact: Dave Smith 01274 434444



e-mail:
david.j.smith@bradford.gov.uk

Access to work funding is available to help with reasonable adjustment costs.

Dave Miller spoke about risk assessments for pregnant workers. He said a leaflet produced by USDAW is very useful and can be easily found on the internet - www.usdaw.org.uk/campaigns/maternity_rights/resources/1076082455_3769.html Pregnant women are often reluctant to inform employers of the fact that they are pregnant, this makes it difficult for employers to look after pregnant workers but the law requires that employers identify and remove risks to pregnant and new mothers, so information should be made available to all women of childbearing age. If the risk cannot be removed or reduced the employer should adjust hours/working conditions, offer a suitable alternative job or suspend on full pay for as long as is necessary. Dave said it is usually due to this last option that the employers find some alternative



work for pregnant and new mothers.

Speaking about risk assessments for young workers, Brian Marsden said: Young people are covered in regulation 19 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Young people are inexperienced, often unaware of health and safety risks and physically and mentally immature. They require good supervision and control. A special risk assessment must be carried out on workers less than 18 years of old. Employers can download a free risk assessment leaflet from the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf, Brian said that there is nothing complicated about doing risk assessments, it's basically a case of thinking about things before hand, looking at what can go wrong or do harm, looking at how to manage these risks, how to prohibit dangerous activities, explaining dangers clearly and setting meaningful useful tasks. If you have a small business take the young person with you when you have to go away and do not leave them on their own. The HSE info line is very helpful and free 0845 345 6055.



Working at Heights

The Working at Heights Regulations became law in April 2005. They are designed to increase the standard of safety at which working at heights is carried out. They do make easier for the HSE and Environmental Health departments to prosecute, particularly in the case of accidents or failing to follow procedures regarding exposure to falls within the work activity.

It is essential that any working at heights is carried to the current working practices.

If your work activity:

- √ involves employees working at heights, or
- √ employees are exposed to a potential fall (i.e. Cellars), or
- √ your building has fragile surfaces (i.e. Skylights), or
- √ people are exposed to a risk from falling objects, you need to check your risk assessment.

You should review your risk assessment in relation to the following criteria:

You should first of all decide if you can take action to avoid staff working at heights i.e. cleaning with extension mops rather than working from steps.

If they have to work at heights is their equipment appropriate?

- √ Steps and ladders should be manufactured to commercial standards not domestic quality (see our guidance on ladders and steps).
- √ Should they be working on a scaffold or platform rather than a ladder or steps?
- √ Is a hydraulic platform the most appropriate access system?

Have they been trained to use the access equipment? See below.

Is the equipment inspected, maintained and monitored on a periodic basis?

Do the staff carrying out this work, understand their own responsibilities:

- √ to report defects
- √ to comply with any instructions
- √ to follow agreed procedures

Are they supervised?

If you have fragile surfaces i.e. roofs with skylights, are there precautions to prevent access from the public and does the risk have warning signs?

If your staff work in areas that expose them to falls from heights, are the appropriate precautions taken e.g. harnesses and restraint systems?

If your work activity exposes people to falling objects, ensure effective precautions are taken.

Note

Leeds College of Building run a half day course on Working at Heights including Ladders, 0113 222 6006.

Keighley College run a 30 hour programme on Working at Heights, Andy Quinn, 01274 438633.

Workers' Memorial Day

Mourn for the dead and fight for the living

A few tears were shed at Bradford's Workers' Memorial Day at a public meeting held at the Midland Hotel on April 28th. The theme for the international day of mourning in Bradford was asbestos. The logo for Workers' Memorial Day is a purple ribbon tied up with a forget me knot- this is to remember the workers who have died. The event was organised by the recently formed Bradford Trade Union Health and Safety Representatives Network. Ian Bullen and Chris Wormold GMB Union men from Ciba Chemicals and members of the Health and Safety Reps Network, stood outside the Midland Hotel in contamination suits with skeleton masks to guide people into the meeting.



Carol Duerden, Chair of Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum opened the meeting by saying that although the official number for workers killed at work in Great Britain over the last year is 235, this in fact is a considerable underestimation. The actual toll is much higher for example the people who die from industrial diseases is not included. Carol introduced all the speakers and shared some of her experiences dealing with work related death.



Mick Gledhill from the Bradford Communication Workers Union gave a potted history of Workers Memorial Day and some of the statistics given by the International Labour Organisation. He told the meeting that internationally it is estimated that 2.2 million workers have died over the last year. This works out at 1 death every 15 seconds. Mick said that work kills more people than wars do, and more people are killed at work than on the roads. Trades Unions are demanding that a law is made for corporate killing, that Directors of companies have legal health and safety duties and that there is stricter enforcement of health and safety laws with higher fines.

A minute's silence followed Mick's presentation; a heartfelt lament played on Northumbrian pipes by Adrian Schofield broke the silence. Mavis Robinson who received an MBE for her outstanding dedication to nursing victims of mesothelioma then gave an account, in lay person's terms, of the devastating effect asbestos has on people's lives. Mavis said that there is no treatment to cure mesothelioma only treatment to relieve the symptoms. Ann, a widow of a man who recently died of mesothelioma, spoke about the frightening journey she and her husband took to discover what this unrelenting cancer was all about. In 2003 her healthy husband was given eight months to live after going to see the doctor about breathing difficulties he had had whilst on holiday. Ann spoke about coming to terms with having very little hope - her husband managed to survive 14 months after diagnosis. Ann said that her husband's suffering was so bad that when he died it was a relief to both of them.

Tony Whitson representing Northern Asbestos Support Groups from Manchester Hazards Centre was next on the agenda. Tony said that it is incredible that today asbestos is still mined; it is mostly sent to developing countries. To add insult to injury, Tony said, state compensation for victims of asbestos is a big issue with very few being paid Industrial Disability Benefit, victims are also robbed of civil payment. Turner and Newall, who manufactured asbestos, started paying 4-500 asbestos victims a year until Federal Mogul bought them out. Federal Mogul then went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy, this 'resolved' payment to victims. Chapter 11 bankruptcy is not really bankruptcy! Federal Mogul continued with post bankruptcy operations, it had money to buy another company after bankruptcy and it has shot up the Future 500 list. Tony said that often victims are too sick to get angry about not receiving any compensation but many of their families do get angry and are busy campaigning for compensation and a worldwide ban on asbestos.

Ruth Davies and Satpal Singh, asbestos specialist solicitors from John Pickering and Partners, were next on the agenda and furthered the debate about companies trying to shirk their responsibilities. Ruth said that 1 in 100 of every male born in the 1940s will die from mesothelioma. Satpal spoke about some asbestos cases.

A senator in the states is pushing a bill through for a fund for non-fault compensation, and that UK law usually follows the States. An Australian company, James Hardy tried to do a similar thing as Turner and Newall by relocating to the Netherlands, after an inquiry that was instigated by the unions on three continents, James Hardy was forced to establish a 1.9 million compensation fund in Australia. Satpal spoke about Associated Weavers, part of Carpets International, a local company from which there has been several cases of mesothelioma recently. Other cases discussed by Ruth included Mr Barker who had been exposed to asbestos through self-employment and through his employer, Teresa McGuire whose only possible exposure to asbestos was through washing her husband's work clothes and Mrs Cook who received a settlement from exposure from walking her dog around a factory.

The time bomb is ticking - If any readers are affected by asbestos and would like to find help contact Jane Howie from Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum on Bradford.baohsf@virgin.net .

Sponsors of Bradford Workers' Memorial Day were: Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum (from which Bradford Trade Union Health and Safety Representative Network was founded), USDAW, GMB, CWU, TUC, Worksafe, John Pickering & Partners Solicitors, Thompsons Solicitors and Rowley Ashworth Solicitors.

Mavis Robinson 0113 231 1010 (contact for Ann also)

Tony Whitson 0161 953 4037

Satpal Singh / Ruth Davies 01422 345535



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To receive newsletters, seminar lists and keep in touch please complete this forum membership slip

Name _____

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