

CONSTRUCTION ACCIDENTS

2.2 million people work in Britain's construction industry, making it the country's biggest industry. It is also one of the most dangerous. In the last 25 years, over 2,800 people have died from injuries they received as a result of construction work. Many more have been injured or made ill.

Falls continue to be the biggest cause of fatal injury in Britain's workplaces, with 24 of the 59 worker deaths in construction in 2005/06 resulting from a fall from height. Unfortunately, this pattern continued in 2006/07. On top of this, over 4,000 major injuries such as broken bones or fractured skulls are reported to HSE each year by the construction industry. Over half of these serious injuries involve falls from height or from tripping over materials on walkways and are easily preventable

The government should set up a fund similar to the model of the [Pension Protection Fund](#), to compensate the families of workers killed in the construction industry, MPs have suggested, after a 25% rise in the number of deaths in the sector. Under current rules, many families are denied compensation because companies go into liquidation, rather than pay compensation. Labour called for a Parliamentary debate after the publication of a report by construction union [Ucatt](#), which revealed that convictions following deaths in the construction industry had fallen by 75% between 1998 and 2004. In 2006-07, however, annual deaths rose to 79 in construction, an increase of 25% on the previous year.

Ucatt, [professionals' union Prospect](#) and the [Public and Commercial Services Union](#) claim the increase in fatalities has occurred alongside [staff cuts](#) at the [Health and Safety Executive](#), the body responsible for inspecting workplaces. Alan Ritchie, general secretary, said: "One death on a building site is one death too many. The lives of building workers cannot be reduced to a financial cost. The government must reverse these cuts and put extra resources into ensuring that this inherently dangerous industry is made safer." The HSE is being forced to cut up to 300 jobs by 2008. Further cuts could materialise as the HSE's parent body, the Department of Work and Pensions, will be forced to trim 5% from its spending over the next three years, the unions warn.

McDermott Bros Contactors Ltd (MBCL), a London-based construction company, was fined £150,000 at Southwark Crown Court yesterday. The prosecution, brought by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), followed its investigation into the death of Mr Vincent Dooley at a building site on 4 December 2000. "The case does however provide some very valuable lessons about working at height which if put into practice should help to prevent this kind of incident occurring. Those who are responsible for planning work should carefully assess the work and decide what safety measures are appropriate. There is a hierarchy of control measures for working at height and the use of personal fall arrest equipment. Harnesses are at the bottom of this hierarchy. Harnesses are almost always a last resort measure and properly constructed working platforms and/or guardrails are nearly always preferable.

The construction industry's current health and safety record is, in the words of the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, "unacceptable"; these statistics show why:

- Workers in the construction industry represent just over 6% of the working population, but account for more than 30% of the fatal accidents and over 14% of the major accidents;
- Workers in the construction industry are almost five times more likely to be killed than the average for all industries;
- They are more than twice as likely to sustain a major injury than the average for all industries;

- Almost a quarter of all inspections carried out by HSE are of construction activities;
- The overall risk of ill health in construction is nearly twice the average for all occupations;
- It is estimated that about 1 in 20 workers, currently or recently working in construction, have suffered a work-related musculo-skeletal disorder;

Guidance for CDM Regulations Construction Design and Management Regulations 2007 (CDM) The CDM 2007 Regulations came into force on the 6th April 2007. This section of the website gives you guidance on the latest changes and their implications. The key aims are to:

- Encourage everyone to work together to make health and safety an integral part of the design, construction and management of projects
- Improve planning and management from day one to identify hazards so that they can be eliminated or properly managed
- Target effort where it can be most effective in terms of health and safety.
- Encourage co-operation and co-ordination of the project

A London School of Economics analysis concluded that "unions gravitate towards accident prone workplaces and react by reducing injury rates." [2] The study showed that where there is a union presence the workplace injury rate is 24 per cent lower than where there is no union presence. One of the reasons unions make such a difference is that they ensure that their safety representatives are trained (*Hazards* 86). And safety representatives know the workplace far better than management as they are aware of what really goes on. They also act as a channel for individual workers to raise their concerns.

The protective effect works for ill-health too. A 2000 study by Cambridge University's Judge Institute of Management found: "The proportion of employees who are trade union members has a positive and significant association on both injury and illness rates." It added: "The arrangements associated with trade unions - formal OHS [occupational health and safety] arrangements of committees and representatives - shows these lower the odds of injury and illness when compared with arrangements that merely inform employees of OHS issues."

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