



Health and Safety Newsletter Update August 2004

Welcome to the August Newsletter Update. In this month's edition, we discuss:

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Contact us

If you would like further information or advice on any health and safety issue then please contact us.

Philip Jones 07973 735161 / Gordon Allan 07973 736967 Or email: info@vehs.co.uk

Also, if you have any comments with regards to the content/layout of our Newsletter Update – please let us know.

Health and safety news

HSC/E Publishes statistics of fatal injuries for 2003/04

The HSC published the latest detailed statistics on fatal injuries in HSE and local authority (LA) enforced sectors in 2003/04 – Statistics of Fatal Injuries 2003/2004. The document can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/fat0304.pdf>

Fatal Injuries to Workers

The figures show that the number of fatally injured workers increased by 4% to 235 in 2003/04 from 227 in 2002/03. The rate of fatal injury also increased by 3% in 2003/04 to 0.81 per hundred thousand workers: the corresponding figure for 2002/03 is 0.79. There was a general downward trend in the rate in the 1990s, however it has risen twice since then, in 2000/01 and in 2003/04.

Nine percent of all fatal injuries to workers in 2003/04 occurred in one single incident when 21 people drowned while harvesting cockles at Morecambe Bay in February.

In 2000, the most recent year for which comparable data are available, the rate of fatal injury to workers in Great Britain was among the lowest of European Union member states.

In 2003/04, 114 (49%) of worker fatalities occurred in the two industries of construction (70) and agriculture, forestry and fishing (44).

Falling from a height continues to be the most common kind of accident, accounting for 29% of fatal injuries to workers in 2003/04. The number of fatal injuries of this kind increased in 2003/04 from 50 to 67. Being struck by a moving vehicle and being struck by a moving or falling object are the next most common kinds of fatal injury.

Industries

In agriculture, forestry and fishing, the number of fatal injuries to workers increased to 44 in 2003/04 from 36 in 2002/03. Of the 44 deaths, 21 occurred at Morecambe Bay. The rate of fatal injury to workers also increased from 9.6 per hundred thousand workers in 2002/03 to 11.4 per in 2003/04.

In construction in 2003/04, there were 70 fatal injuries to workers - the same number as in 2002/03. The rate of fatal injury to workers fell from 3.8 to 3.5 per hundred thousand workers, reflecting an increase in the number of workers. This is the lowest level on record.

In manufacturing, the number of fatal injuries to workers fell for the third consecutive year, from 43 in 2002/03 to 31 in 2003/04. The rate of fatal injury to workers also fell in 2003/04 from 1.2 to 0.9 per hundred thousand workers and is the lowest level seen in the period 1992/93 to 2003/04.

In service industries in 2003/04, there were 80 fatal injuries to workers, an increase from 75 in 2002/03. The rate of fatal injury to workers rose from 0.33 per hundred thousand workers to 0.35 in 2003/04. This is the second year in which both the number and rate of fatal injury have increased. The services sector comprises a wide range of activities and whilst the numbers of fatal injuries fluctuate year on year in many industries, the number in land transport has risen from 16 in 2001/02 to 24 in 2003/04.

In extractive and utility supply industries in 2003/04, there were 10 fatal injuries to workers, compared with 3 in 2002/03 and 14 in 2001/02. In 2003/04, the rate of fatal injury is 5.1 per hundred thousand workers, compared with 1.5 in 2002/03 and 6.5 in 2001/02. The rate of fatal injury in this industry is more susceptible to fluctuation due to the small number of fatalities involved. The 10 deaths in 2003/04 occurred in the supply of gas and electricity (2); open cast coal working (2); the extraction of crude petroleum/natural gas (3); and other mining and quarrying (3).

Keeping you up to date

For the combined three year period of 2001/02 to 2003/04, the industries with the highest rate of fatal injury to employees include the recycling of waste and scrap (27.7 per hundred thousand employees); the mining of coal, lignite and extraction of peat (12.3); and the extraction of crude petroleum and natural gas (9.1).

Fatal Injuries to Members of the Public

The number of members of the public fatally injured in 2003/04 is 371, of which 240 resulted from acts of suicide or trespass on railways. For 2002/03, the corresponding figures were 396 and 257 respectively. In 2003/04, of the non railway fatal injuries, 79 were in the services industry, of which 45 occurred in health and social work. The corresponding figures for 2002/03 were 83 and 47 respectively.

Contractors reminded to keep sites safe from children

Following an incident to a small child on 22 June 2004 at a construction site in Filey, North Yorkshire, the HSE has issued a reminder to contractors that it is their responsibility to keep children off sites and to store materials and plant safely.

In the last 5 years 472 children have been killed or injured on construction sites in Great Britain.

Philip White, head of HSE's Construction Sector said:

"The recent serious incident involving a three year old boy should serve as a sobering reminder to everyone in the construction industry that construction sites are dangerous places for children. With school holidays about to commence across Great Britain, extra care needs to be taken to ensure that sites are secure and that materials and plant are stored safely."

'Protecting the public – your next move', provides guidance to assist contractors in identifying the main risks and provides advice on how to eliminate the hazards and control the risks.

Commuters asked for views on work stress

Stress policy experts were recently at Liverpool Street station to lobby thousands of rush hour commuters for their views on work-related stress. Officials from the HSE were there to encourage people to take part in HSE's innovative consultation and to give away 10,000 CD-Roms as commuters moved through the concourse.

The CD-Roms include a video which outlines what the consultation is about and provides a fast link to the HSE website where people can offer their views. Taking part couldn't be easier, and the deadline is one month away.

At over 13 million days a year, work-related stress is the biggest cause of working days lost through injury or ill-health, costing society about £3.7 billion a year. In 2001/2, over half a million individuals in Britain experienced stress at levels that made them ill.

The consultation highlights a set of management standards which enable employers to gauge stress levels, identify causes and work with employees to resolve any issues.

The standards are not new regulations; they are a non-legislative yardstick to help organisations meet their existing duty of care and their duty to assess the risks of work-related stress. The standards highlight the components of good organisation, job design and management that keep stress levels in check and enhance productivity.

Keeping you up to date

Health and safety managers are the most stressed

According to Personnel Today, H&S managers - the people charged with measuring and managing workplace stress - experience more stress and related issues at work than other staff.

Almost half (40 per cent) of H&S managers are unable to cope with the demands of their work, according to a new survey by research group ORC International.

The poll of 500 H&S managers also found that only a third felt they could meet the requirements of their job without regularly working excessive hours. This is 22 per cent lower than the national average of 55 per cent.

Less than a third said their organisations were committed to tackling the issue of work-related stress.

While two-thirds (65 per cent) of respondents have a clear idea of what is expected of them in their job, less than half feel that the people they work with co-operate to get the work done. Again, this is much lower than the national average of 80 per cent, according to ORC.

A recent report by the Work and Pensions select committee recommended that the number of safety inspectors should be doubled to cut deaths, injuries and illness at work.

The committee of MPs backed calls for a £48m expansion plan for the HSE, which would increase the number of inspectors from 540 to more than 1,000.

HSE warns the textile industry to be aware of fire and explosion risks

Following the recent prosecution of a Lancashire based textile company, the HSE issued a reminder to the textile industry, particularly companies working with flock or other dusty materials, to be aware of the risk of fire or explosion.

The prosecution followed an investigation by HSE into the serious injuries suffered by an employee, a stenter oven operative, during an explosion in January 2002.

The incident occurred immediately after a partial clean of a stenter oven had been completed. The excess flock dust remaining in the oven was drawn into the air when the oven's extractor fan was switched on and subsequently ignited on the oven's pilot light causing a fireball and explosion.

HSE warns - confined spaces kill

The HSE has issued a warning to the manufacturing industry, following a recent triple fatality, that entering confined spaces is extremely dangerous, particularly waste and recycling companies.

Three employees working on a farm near Thetford were asphyxiated in a slurry tank. They were overcome by carbon dioxide; this, compounded by a lack of oxygen, resulted in the workers drowning in less than one metre of liquid. A fourth worker, who also entered the tank, was very fortunate to escape with his life.

The danger of asphyxiation from entering confined spaces is well known. A lack of oxygen, and in some instances the build up of hazardous gases such as carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide, can result in people being quickly overcome with little or no warning before they become unconscious.

Workplace drug testing to treble?

The Independent Inquiry into Drug Testing at Work (IIDTW) has concluded that workplace drug testing could become a fact of everyday working life in the UK, despite little justification for its use.

Keeping you up to date

A Mori poll conducted by the inquiry found that 78 per cent of employers said they would consider drug testing if they believed productivity was being affected by staff's drugs or alcohol consumption. While only one in 25 organisations currently test for substance abuse, one in eight said they were likely to introduce testing within the next year.

The report, which follows an 18-month investigation, warns of the dangers of mandatory drug testing at work, saying it would damage productivity and trust among staff, and that it has no role in the majority of workplaces.

The TUC stated that the increased use of drug testing at work would "boost the profits of companies peddling testing regimes, but do nothing for the productivity, safety or profitability of UK companies". The TUC wants the government to issue clear guidance on drug testing at work, and introduce an accreditation system for drug testing companies.

While accepting that drug testing can have a role in safety-critical environments, or where public trust is an issue, the inquiry said it was unable to find conclusive evidence that drug testing at work is a deterrent, or that it reduces accident rates, or even that drug use, apart from alcohol, is conclusively linked to accidents at work.

British Airways is bringing in drug and alcohol testing from 1 August for all its 31,000 UK ground staff, bringing them into line with its cabin crew, who have been tested for some years.

BA spokesperson states that drug and alcohol testing was something the company had been aiming to introduce for the past few years as a "naturally progressing safety measure". He explained that all ground staff will be randomly tested in the first six months of employment and, after that, if they are suspected of substance abuse while on duty.

Construction health and safety showing signs of improvement

Results from the FaTaL Risks Campaign blitz indicate that health and safety performance in the construction industry is improving.

During the nationwide FaTaL Risks Campaign blitz in June 2004, HSE inspectors issued a prohibition notice halting poorly controlled construction activities to approximately one in five sites.

The figures show some improvement when compared with the nationwide blitz in September 2003, when inspectors issued prohibition notices to one in four sites visited.

Inspectors contacted 1691 dutyholders of all types of project and visited 1255 sites across the country; over 90% of projects visited had less than 50 workers. The inspections, which focused on falls from height, transport and lifting operations resulted in 240 prohibition and 74 improvement notices being served.

HSE reminds the fibre reinforced plastics industry to be alert to fire

The HSE has issued a reminder to all fibre reinforced plastics (FRP) firms to be alert to the risks of fire, explosion and styrene exposure.

Information sheets published by HSE outline the actions industry should take to reduce the risk of incidents, and how to assess and control workers' exposure to styrene.

Every year, fires and explosions in the industry result in injury to workers, lost production, and sometimes complete closure of businesses. The majority of incidents are caused by poor control of flammable materials used or produced in the fabrication of FRP.

Keeping you up to date

Poor control of styrene can put workers health at risk. HSE is aware that many companies do not monitor exposure to styrene, and suspect that many do not report styrene related ill-health cases.

Plastics Processing sheet No. 14 "Assessing and controlling styrene levels during contact moulding of fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP) products" summarises the health hazards that can arise from exposure to styrene and gives practical guidance to FRP manufacturers on assessing and controlling styrene levels in the workplace.

Plastics Processing sheet No. 15 "Reducing the risk of fire or explosion during the manufacture of fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP) products" summarises what can be done to control fire and explosion hazards in fibre laminating and aims to help businesses carry out risk assessments and decide what control measures are needed.

These free guidance sheets have been produced in consultation with industry stakeholders and will help FRP businesses identify hazards and provide sensible control measures to keep people safe at work.

Health and safety guidance

HSE publishes new guidance on accident investigation

The HSE has published new guidance on how to investigate accidents and incidents, including near misses.

The guidance, which was prepared in consultation with industry, unions and health and safety professional bodies, is intended as a first step in introducing organisations to the benefits of carrying out investigations and the methods by which accidents should be recorded, investigated and the findings acted upon.

The guidance is aimed primarily at small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) where it is often difficult to build up an expertise in investigating, although larger organisations may also find it helpful.

No previous expertise is needed to use the workbook and guidance notes that take the user step-by-step through the investigating process from start to finish and includes worked examples and blank template forms for accident analysis.

The four steps featured in the guidance are:

- the gathering of information;
- the analysing of information;
- identifying risk control measures; and
- and the action plan and its implementation.

Copies of 'Investigating accidents and incidents - a workbook for employers, unions, safety representatives and safety professionals' (HSE Ref. HSG245) are available from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA (Tel: 01787-881165/Fax: 01787-313995). Priced publications are also available from good booksellers. ISBN 0 7176 2827 2, price £9.50.

Health and safety court round up

Laundry fined £325,000 following fatality

A laundry company based in Basingstoke was yesterday fined £325,000 by Bournemouth Crown Court. The case followed an investigation by the HSE into the death of an employee in March 2003.

Keeping you up to date

The employee crawled into the internal workings of a large industrial washing machine to attempt to clear a blockage. He became trapped inside one of the machine's compartments; the fire brigade was called to site to cut a hole into the machine to free him. Despite their efforts Mr Clegg was pronounced dead on arrival at hospital. He died from heat exhaustion caused by the conditions inside the machine.

The laundry company had pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 in that it failed to ensure the safety at work of one of its employees, specifically that the company did not provide a safe system of work for their employee. Guidance on how to safely clear blockages was available to the company from both the manufacturer of the washing machine and the Textile Services Association.

Construction company fined £150,000 following worker death

A major construction company was fined £150,000 at the Central Criminal Court, London. The case followed an investigation by the HSE into the death of a sub-contractor in June 2000 during the redevelopment of buildings at the Woolwich Arsenal, London.

The company had earlier pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, in that they failed to ensure that persons not in their employment were not exposed to risks to their safety. The sub-contractor was working on the roof, which had on each of its four pitches a wired glass roof light that extended along the full length of the building. He fell through one of these roof lights to the concrete floor below, a distance of approximately 11 metres. He died from his injuries four days later.

The company was the principal contractor on the site that was being developed into the Royal Artillery Museum, and had received prior warnings about the danger presented by the fragile roof. Other contractors working on the roof had complained about the inadequate protection provided around the roof lights, and company had agreed that improvements were needed. However, they did not suspend work while these improvements were carried out, and the death occurred before the work was completed. The sub-contractor did not receive a formal site induction, and no risk assessment or method statement was prepared before their work commenced.

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