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SITE FIRE RISKS ENFORCEMENT CRACKDOWN



The Health and Safety Executive will be looking closely at fire prevention measures on construction sites and will impose their authority over dangerous working practices in order to reduce the risk of fire.

Inspector in charge of fire and refurbishment in the HSE's Construction Division, Phil Burgess, said: *"We'll try to lift the profile of fire safety in construction. We'll look at safety in general, particularly in high-risk buildings such as timber frame, refurbishment and tall buildings."*

The HSE, the fire brigade and the UK Timber Frame Association (UKTFA) have just completed research into the fire risks of multistorey timber-frame buildings, the results of which should be available in guidance published in the near future. The guidelines will cover the safe storage of materials, care with hot works and the early installation of fire separation.

The move follows the outbreak of fires on several multi-storey timber frame developments in the past couple of years:

- > July 2006 - Beaufort Court, Colindale
- > March 2007 - Deans Park, Willenhall
- > April 2007 - Falconar Street, Newcastle upon Tyne
- > August 2007 - Lemsford Road, Hatfield
- > March 2008 - Burnage Lane, Manchester
- > April 2008 - Hawkhill Close, Edinburgh

- > A fire at a 5 storey block being constructed by Bellway Homes destroyed 82 flats. The cause of the fire is believed to be arson.
- > May 2008 - Waterfront Gait, Edinburgh
- > Fire obliterated a 6 storey timber frame block of flats, causing approximately 150 local residents to be evacuated. The cause is suspected to be arson.

There is a range of legislation that covers construction site fire safety. During the design stage of a project, given consideration to fire safety issues that may arise during construction can help to ensure that the requirements of the legislation can be met.

Mitigating risks: The potential impact of building design and system specification on construction site fire safety can be illustrated through several examples:

Control of ignition sources: The amount of hot works required on site can sometimes be reduced during the design stage by careful specification, for example: bolted steelwork connection in lieu of welded connections; push-fit plumbing in lieu of braised jointing.

Control of combustibles: Fire properties of materials can vary depending on whether they are on their own or part of a composite building element. Timber framed buildings are a good example since they present a much higher fire hazard when the frames are exposed compared with when they are clad in their finished form. Bringing timber stud panels to site with a lining already in place can help to reduce the amount of exposed material that could contribute to fire development.

Forward planning: If it is anticipated that a fire during construction may present an unusually high risk, liaising with the fire service can help them to plan an appropriate response, and may even influence the construction sequence. For example, fighting a fire in a tall building is likely to be problematic; however, by installing a working fire main as early as possible during construction the risk can be reduced.

For larger or more complex projects, a construction phase fire strategy may be needed to identify potential risks and mitigation measures that may be required. Of course, fire safety during construction depends on a range of factors including training of site personnel, site security, and management policies, all of which should be considered by those persons responsible for the construction site. However, by considering the issues during design, the risk can be better dealt with as the project enters the construction phase.

CORGI GAS TO NO LONGER RUN THE GAS REGISTRATION SCHEME

Capita has been selected as preferred partner by the HSE for a contract valued at £14 million per year for at least 5 years, currently expected to commence on 1st April 2009. The new gas installer registration scheme will replace the current CORGI registration scheme, and is expected to deliver a renewed focus on gas safety.

The sole purpose will be to carry out gas installer registration, inspection and raise awareness of gas safety issues amongst gas consumers. Around 250 CORGI employees are expected to transfer to the new scheme.

Paul Pindar, Chief Executive of Capita commented: *"Capita is delighted to have the opportunity to create a new, highly targeted and effective registration scheme that will significantly reduce the administration and cost burden on registered installers. We are pleased to be able to support HSE in their pursuit of continuing to improve gas safety and customer satisfaction. We will also work in close collaboration with other industry bodies to improve standards and raise consumer awareness of gas safety."*

CORGI Chief Executive, Mike Thompson said:

"CORGI is naturally disappointed with the decision but will now work closely with the HSE and Capita to ensure a smooth transition process between scheme providers in the interests of gas safety... It is worth reinforcing that this decision should have little or no impact on the day-to-day business of CORGI registered businesses. This decision affects the registration scheme only and will not impact on competence measurements such as the ACS scheme"

HSE FOCUS STILL ON QUICK HITCHES

The Health and Safety Executive are focussing on semi-automatic quick couplers, following the death of four construction workers involving the machinery in a year.

Operator error is usually to blame for the incidents, when contractors use the machinery without getting out of their cabs to knock in the pin to save time. Incidents have been noted involving quick couplers with manual safety pins on power-operated hooks, and manual pins on hydraulically operated sliding jaw/wedge holding devices are also of concern. HSE Inspectors have been issued with guidance to identify which types of couplers to look out for, and will take action if they see someone operating a machine without a safety pin.

HSE have issued advice on semi-automatic couplers:

- > Excavator operators should be adequately trained on the use of quick hitches in general.
- > Excavator operators should be competent to use the specific hitch on the machine they use.
- > The manufacturer-specified retaining pin must be available on the machine.
- > Operators should only use pins which have been designed for this specific use.
- > There should be a system for checking that the pin is in place on the hitch before starting the work, and every time a different attachment is used.
- > Operators should be instructed not to use the machine unless they are satisfied that the quick hitch is secured in place. If the operator cannot see from the cab of the vehicle due to poor weather then he must check from the ground.
- > Those in control of sites should undertake random checks to ensure the precautions are being implemented.

Plant suppliers expect the European Commission to ban semi-automatic quick hitches; a meeting was scheduled for June to discuss this issue but has been postponed until November. The HSE has given plant operators until October 1st to stop fitting semi-automatic couplers to machines.

NO INCREASE IN HSE INSPECTORS FOR 2008/09

Despite calls for an increase in construction industry Inspectors, the HSE will aim to maintain numbers at their current figure of 134.

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) has renewed its calls for an eventual doubling of the number of front line Inspectors, without which it considers a 10% reduction in major incidents and fatalities impossible to achieve, but HSE Chair Judith Hackett said:

"With finite resources, some tough decisions are required on what we can and cannot do." She added: "2008/09 will be a year of change and transition for our organisation. We will also start thinking about a new strategy."

The HSE's 2008/09 Business Plan states:

"We recognise that, while we respond to failures in the workplace in a robust way, we must also be proactive and seek improvements that prevent such failures."

"We are working closely with other regulators, sharing information and knowledge, to improve effectiveness."

HSE MYTH OF THE MONTH

MYTH: Adults can't put plasters on children's cuts



THE REALITY:

We've often heard of teachers, volunteers and carers being told to ask parents for permission, or even requiring parents to drive over and put the plaster on themselves.

This persistent myth causes a lot of unnecessary hassle and worry.

There is no rule that says a responsible adult can't put a plaster on a child's minor cut. Some children do have an allergy to latex in normal plasters; using them can cause a rash but is not serious. If you know a child is allergic you can use the hypo-allergenic type of plaster.

The important thing is to clean and cover the cut to stop it getting infected.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

The following Open Courses are being held at CQMS' Training Room in Grantham in July:

BRITISH SAFETY COUNCIL AWARD

What is the course?

Level 1 Certificate in Health and Safety at Work (British Safety Council)

When?

Tuesday 29 July 2008
10:00 am – 17:00 pm.

How many places are available?

A maximum of 10.

Who should attend?

The course is suitable for anyone; it does not require any previous knowledge or experience.

What is the cost?

£0.00 to CQMS Clients.

CQMS SEMINAR CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER

What is the course?

Corporate Manslaughter: Awareness of the New Act

When?

Wednesday 30 July 2008
10:00 am – 13:00 pm.

How many places are available?

A maximum of 16.

Who should attend?

The course is essential for all Senior Management

What is the cost?

£0.00 to CQMS Clients.

To book your place on the any of the detailed training courses, please contact CQMS' offices on either:

- > Tel: 01476 566665 / 564242
- > Email: training-events@cqms-ltd.com

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

FIRE SAFETY FAILINGS LEAD TO FINE

Iceland Foods has been fined £15,000 plus costs of £13,500 after a series of fire safety failings which lead to a woman being stranded on the roof of a burning store.

In September 2006, an electrical fire broke out on a fuseboard on the ground floor at the Bulwell store in Nottingham. Nottingham Magistrates' Court heard that the fire blocked the only internal staircase to the first floor, and six members of staff were forced to evacuate to the roof where they found that the vertical escape ladder was padlocked. Although the lock was eventually broken with a crowbar allowing them to climb to safety, one member of staff felt unable to use the ladder due to a lack of fire safety training and had to be rescued by firefighters.

The incident took place just before the introduction of the Fire Safety Order, so Iceland Foods pleaded guilty to contravening a number of regulations in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, namely:

- > Failing to properly manage fire safety measures - Regulation 5
- > Failing to properly train and instruct members of staff in fire safety measures – Regulation 13(2)
- > Failing to ensure fire doors and ladders were free from locks or fastenings – Regulation 5(2)(f)
- > Failing to ensure a speedy and safe means of escape – Regulation 5(2)(b)

The Head of Fire Protection at Nottingham Fire and Rescue Service stated that the store had not followed its' own risk assessment and that fire safety training was inadequate and intermittent.

BBC SETTLES IN ASBESTOS CASE

The BBC has agreed to pay £55,000 to the daughter of a man who died of asbestos related cancer after 30 years in its scenery department. It settled with Julie Leach, 44, of Kingsbury, northwest London, before a High Court Hearing.

HP BULMER LTD AND NALCO LTD PROSECUTED FOLLOWING OUTBREAK OF LEGIONNAIRE'S DISEASE

Warning comes after HP Bulmer Limited and Nalco Limited, who had previously pleaded guilty to contraventions of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, following an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease in Hereford that occurred in 2003, were fined at Hereford Crown Court on 1st July, 2008.

HP Bulmer Limited of Staines, Middlesex was fined £300,000 with costs of £50,000 after pleading guilty to a breach of Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. Nalco Ltd of Northwick, Cheshire was simultaneously also fined £300,000 with costs of £50,000 after also pleading guilty to a breach of Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

FALL FROM HEIGHT RESULTS IN TEENAGER DEATH AND JAIL FOR ROOFING BOSS

A 17 year old who fell to his death through a fragile skylight had been employed by a roofing contractor, North Eastern Roofing, for only a week.

On the day of the incident, Daniel Dennis had been sent onto the roof of a shop to fetch timber remaining from previous work. Although the building had fragile roof lights, they had not been identified as posing a risk and Mr. Dennis fell through one of the lights to the shop below, approximately 9 metres, sustaining fatal internal injuries.

Roy Clark, the owner of North Eastern Roofing, was jailed for 10 months after pleading guilty to a charge of manslaughter by failing in his duty of care to Mr. Dennis and ordered to pay the full costs of £18,000. In mitigation Clark said he had no previous convictions nor had there been any other deaths or accidents involving

his company, however Prohibition Notices had previously been served on Clark in 1997 and 1999 regarding unsafe roof work.

Dean Baker, the investigating HSE Inspector, said: *"The accident happened because the risk had not been assessed, and there was no barrier or guardrail preventing people gaining access to the existing roof.... This tragic case demonstrates the need for employers to take serious steps to ensure anyone working at height is properly trained, and given appropriate equipment to do their job safely. These measures had not been taken in this case, and Daniel Dennis was never given any training or induction for working at height."*

SPINNING LATHE SEVERED ARM

A Peterborough company have been fined following an incident which resulted in an employee losing his left arm below the elbow.

Roger Boon was setting up work on a moving lathe when his clothing became caught on a protruding bolt on the revolving endplate of the machine. He was dragged into and then over the machine, causing his left arm to be severed. Mr. Boon was a competent operator, but had not been trained in the process of setting up the machine.

A suitable risk assessment had been undertaken covering the use of the lathes but the employer, Peter Brotherhood Ltd, had not assessed the risks of the setting up operation.

Investigating HSE Inspector, Paul Hoskins, stated that *the employer could have made the process safer in a number of ways, preferably by automating the setting up operation and preventing human exposure by guarding. If this was not possible, then a switch to slow the spinning lathe would have been appropriate.*

Peter Brotherhood Ltd were fined £7,500 plus costs of £16,000 after pleading guilty to a breach of Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

In mitigation, the company stated that it has kept Mr. Boon on and has since retrained him, and it was between safety officers at the time of the incident as its full time safety person had resigned. After the incident, the endplate was redesigned by the company so that the bolts did not protrude, therefore eliminating the risk of entanglement.

COUNCIL TO BLAME FOR CARETAKER'S FALL FROM LADDER

A school caretaker who injured himself falling off a stepladder won a compensation case against his local council yesterday (27/06/2008) after insisting they had not taught him how to use it. Anthony Gower-Smith, 73, sued Hampshire County Council for negligence when he tumbled off a 6ft ladder at Awbridge Primary School in Romsey, Hampshire, in 2004. At the High Court it was ruled that the council was 75% responsible for the fall, in which Mr. Gower-Smith suffered a fractured skull, a broken cheekbone and trauma to the kidneys. He has not been able to work since. The council contested that Mr. Gower-Smith had been given

adequate training and said that when he started the job in 2002 he had signed an induction sheet confirming he had received tuition. Mr. Gower-Smith's compensation will now be assessed.

WORKER BLINDED BY FLYING ABRASIVE WHEEL

A welding firm, Weldex, has been fined £10,500 and ordered to pay full costs of £2,832 after pleading guilty to three breaches of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 after a worker lost his sight in one eye due to being hit by a grinding disc.

Norman Fielding had been repairing a weld on a metal tube by grinding out imperfections using a 4.5 inch cutting disc on a sidegrinder machine designed only to take wheels of 1 inch size when the accident happened. The grinder had also been adapted in order to hold the expanded discs and was operating at 28,000 rpm, more than twice the manufacturers' recommended running speed, making it more likely to rupture. The disc shattered and flew at speed into his helmet, penetrated the visor and entered his left eye in which he is now permanently blind.

Mr. Fielding had not been given any training on the risks of abrasive wheels, and the machine should also have been guarded to prevent the disc from hitting the visor. In mitigation Weldex said that it had been an unusual occurrence, and pointed to its previously good safety record.

Weldex breached PUWER Regulation 4(1) by providing unsuitable equipment, Regulation 9(1) by failing to provide adequate training in the use of work equipment, and Regulation 12(1) by not taking precautions to prevent risks to health and safety when work equipment is used.

HSE PROSECUTES PRINTER FOLLOWING MULTIPLE BREACHES OF SAFETY LAWS

Clays Ltd of Bungay was fined £32,000 and ordered to pay costs of £12,000 at Lowestoft Magistrates' Court Monday 30 June.

The company pleaded guilty to three breaches of Section 2(1) and one breach of section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. In addition, guilty pleas were entered in respect of breaches of Regulations 3 and 5 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

In July 2005, a Clays Ltd employee was carrying out maintenance on the roof of its Popson Street site, when he slipped and fell through a skylight. The employee fell 7 metres onto a metal cage and sustained multiple injuries causing him to be off work for several months.

The HSE investigation into this incident found that there were limited safeguards to prevent injury from falling from height. Furthermore, poor health and safety standards were found in other areas, including the use of actuator keys to disarm guarding on machinery. The keys allow the user to override the safety devices and use the machines unguarded. Employees were also found to be working on the racking at the site warehouse without adequate safeguards to prevent falls from height.