



QUARTER 3 Newsletter

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SKIN PROTECTION

Protection of the skin from the effects of hazardous agents is something which is often overlooked as the damage does not always immediately manifest itself. Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun can damage the skin and can lead to sunburn, blistering and even skin cancer. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer, with over 40,000 new cases diagnosed each year.

Employers should assess the risks to all workers, particularly if they spend large amounts of time outside as part of their job. Sun protection advice should be included as part of health and safety training with encouragement given to keep covered up during the hotter summer months. Employees should also be encouraged to check their skin regularly for signs of skin damage; unusual spots or moles which change size, shape or colour. Management need to enforce these control measures and ensure that workers are provided with adequate water and shade to prevent dehydration. Employees should seek medical advice promptly if they find anything concerning.

Another skin disorder which is caused, or made worse, by work is work-related dermatitis. Work-related dermatitis is one of the major occupational skin diseases which is caused by a person coming into contact with a hazardous agent. This commonly occurs during direct handling of the agent, exposure to deposits in the air or contact with contaminated surfaces, for example workbenches.

Construction industry workers, engineers and cleaners are particularly prone to developing dermatitis, however it is important to recognise that the problem is industry-wide. Contact with oils and cleaning agents can leave the skin blistered, cracked, red and sore which can provide an entry route for secondary infections.

Prevention of work-related skin disease is relatively simple. If hazardous agents must be used as part of the process, the employers should ensure that suitable and sufficient control measures are implemented. Employers should ensure that adequate welfare facilities are available for employees to wash their hands and forearms after contact with the hazardous agent. Barrier creams, if correctly and regularly used, are also an effective control measure.

Training of employees during induction and at regular intervals is an effective method of providing instruction on recognising the early symptoms of dermatitis and how to report the disease to management. Training should also cover prevention techniques such as hand washing and use of barrier creams. Simple health surveillance can be undertaken by line management, such as visual inspection of the hands, which will show early signs of the disease.

The HSE has produced a poster detailing how to effectively wash the hands and forearms, this is available on the HSE website at:
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/posters/skinwashing.pdf>

Tool box talks can be undertaken covering this subject by CQMS Ltd. Please contact for further information or advice.

ELECTRICITY AT WORK

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) receives approximately 1000 reports of accidents at work related to electricity each year, and around 30 people die as a result of their injuries.

Injuries and deaths arise from:

- Contact with underground cables during excavation
- Contact with overhead cables
- Use of badly maintained electrically-powered equipment
- Work on, or near, 230V domestic electricity supplies.

The HSE are working to prevent accidents and mitigate the effects of those which do occur by revising Regulations and Guidance documents to ensure best practice.

Research has also been commissioned by the HSE into earthing proposals and guidance on the selection, use, care and maintenance of switchgear up to 3kV.

Before undertaking work using electrical equipment, it is imperative that:

- Risk assessments identifying the hazards, risks arising from the hazards and control measures are undertaken by a competent person.
- The equipment is suitable for the task, and it is in good working order.
- Residual current device (RCD) is utilised where applicable.
- Training has been provided to the user to enable them to safely use the machinery.
- Personal protective equipment is provided where applicable and the user is aware of how to wear it.

WORK-RELATED STRESS

A report published in May by the HSE shows that just over one fifth of British workers are concerned about work-related stress, and around 13 million working days were lost due to work-related stress in 2004/5.

Stress is the adverse reaction people may have to pressure exerted on them. Whilst pressure is part and parcel of many jobs and keeps us motivated, stress has

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a negative impact on productivity and can manifest itself in both physical and mental ill-health.

HSE Chief Executive Geoffrey Podger said:

“Stress is a major problem in British workplaces and this survey underlines that. Stress can occur in any workplace and it is important that both employers and employees recognise the symptoms at an early stage.”

Work-related ill health is a problem for employers. By tackling stress, the benefits to businesses include:

- Increased staff performance and productivity.
- Increased employee commitment.
- Reduction in staff turnover.
- Improved organisational image and reputation.

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitrary Service) have said the following:

“Organisations who talk regularly with their employees and have sound systems and procedures in place for dealing with issues like absence and discipline are much more likely to avoid work-related stress and be able to deal with potentially stressful situations when they arise.”

Employers are also encouraged to implement a systematic approach to deal with sickness absence, including supporting employees with a return to work procedure. This will involve:

- Checking and recording sickness absence.
- Ensuring management are trained to deal effectively with sickness absence.
- Absent employees are involved in planning their return to work.
- Assessing the work they will do to ensure it is suitable (physically and mentally).
- Assessing the individual's arrangements/ conditions of work to ensure they do not hinder their return to work.
- All risks to employees from work activities are controlled.

However, the over-riding message from the HSE is that prevention is better than cure, and ill-health can be prevented by ensuring pro-active procedures are in place in conjunction with suitable and sufficient risk assessments.

SMOKING AT WORK

From summer 2007, smoking will be prohibited in all enclosed public places in England with fines enforced on employers who do not comply with the rules.

The health and safety legislation requires employers to reduce the risk to the health and safety of their

employees from second hand smoking to as low a level as reasonably practicable.

The HSE advises the following measures are implemented:

- A policy containing details of smoking in the workplace is in place.
- Employers should take action to reduce the risk to as low a level as reasonably practicable.
- The smoking policy should give priority to the needs of non-smokers who do not wish to breathe tobacco smoke.

Employers should consult their employees (and their representatives) on the appropriate smoking policy for their workplace.

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY WARNING OVER SCAFFOLDING COLLAPSE

The HSE *has* issued a safety alert to the construction industry following a major scaffolding collapse in Milton Keynes in April.

Three workers were seriously injured when 15 floors of scaffolding collapsed ‘like a pack of cards’ at the Jurys Inn hotel building site. One of the men, 49-year-old John Robinson, later died in hospital after suffering a heart attack.

Firms have been warned of the importance of having proper procedures in place to provide and maintain stable scaffolds.

The Executive recommends that construction employers review their arrangements regularly, taking into account factors such as: scaffolding design implementation; the risk of direct impact by construction plant or vehicles; and arrangements for securing scaffolding to structures.

Other topics that should be covered include intended and actual loadings on scaffolds, and the frequency of scaffold inspection arrangements.

The full warning is at: www.hse.gov.uk/construction/scaffolding.htm



RECENT PROSECUTIONS:

LACK OF ON-SITE RISK ASSESSMENT LEADS TO FRACTURED PELVIS

A construction worker suffered a fractured pelvis after his employer Byrne Brothers (Formwork) Limited, failed to carry out a specific risk assessment on an on-site task, the Old Bailey heard.

Concrete pump operator Alan Wyatt was injured when the cleaning of a pipe previously used to take concrete from the ground to the 12th floor of a central London development went wrong.

The court heard that once the concrete pour was complete, a heavyweight sponge ball was pushed through the pipe from the top using compressed air. The bottom of the pipe was placed over a skip to collect the concrete and, eventually, the ball. However, as the ball travelled down the pipe it became stuck and air pressure built up behind it, the build-up of pressure caused the pipe's lower end to whip away from the skip, hitting Wyatt, who was standing a few metres away. He suffered a pelvic fracture and a puncture wound to his groin.

The ball was also ejected over a hoarding onto a path, narrowly missing a member of the public. Prosecuting for the HSE. Jonathan Ashley-Norman said Byrne Brothers had not carried out a specific risk assessment on cleaning out the concrete-carrying pipe.

This led to a number of mistakes:

The bottom end of the pipe was not securely fastened to the skip; a 'ball-catcher' was not secured to the end of the pipe to trap the ball on release and workers were not kept away from the skip. Ashley-Norman added that those cleaning the pipe had not been given adequate training. Byrne Brothers, which pleaded guilty, said operatives had received training including being shown a video on how to correctly clean concrete-carrying pipes. It now uses clamps to fix the pipes to skips.

Sentencing, Judge Richard Hone said any failure to appropriately train staff was minor but not carrying out a specific risk assessment was a serious error.

Byrne Brothers (Formwork) Limited was fined a total of £60,000 for breaching Sections 2(1) and 3(1) of the HSWA.

After the case, HSE principal construction inspector Emma Davies said: "The risks associated with the use of compressed air to clean concrete pipelines are well known within the industry as are measures needed to

manage them. "Had Byrne Brothers carried out the appropriate risk assessment, then the accident to Mr. Wyatt would not have happened."

CONSTRUCTION COMPANY FINED £50,000 AFTER SITE TRAFFIC DEATH

M J Gleeson Group plc has been fined following the death of a quantity surveyor, Brian Gibson, who was working on the site controlled by Gleeson (the Principal Contractor) during the construction of new student accommodation.

Mr. Gibson emerged from the welfare facilities into the adjoining narrow roadway as a fork-lift truck was reversing along it. Mr. Gibson was not seen by the driver and he was run over by the truck's offside wheel and suffered fatal injuries.

Gleeson's had failed to follow their method statement, which identified the need to separate pedestrian and traffic routes, ensure that vehicle reversing was kept to a minimum and use a banksman when reversing. It was shown that no banksman was present when the accident occurred, and the traffic management system had not been regularly reviewed or amended to take into account changes in work conditions.

The company was fined £50,000 for a breach of section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 for failing to ensure the health and safety of employees, plus £14,000 costs.

The investigating HSE inspector commented that this had been a tragic accident that could have been avoided. It emphasised the importance of traffic management on construction sites and the need to plan at the outset to ensure that a traffic management system is updated as the site evolves.

WORKER PARALYSED AFTER FALL THROUGH OPEN TRAPDOOR

A Derbyshire chemical manufacturer has been fined £40,000 after a worker was left paralysed from the waist down by a 12-foot fall through a trapdoor Lancashire Chemical Works Limited pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 6(3) of the Work at Height Regulations 2005, by failing to take suitable measures to prevent an employee falling. It was also ordered to pay £15,000 costs.

Prosecuting for the HSE. Deanna Heer told Derby Crown Court that Stephen Monks was operating a spray dryer machine positioned on the second floor of

the company's plant in Glossop, when the accident happened in April 2005.

The spray dryer's motor developed a fault and needed to be replaced. As a result, Monks removed the motor and winched it to ground level through two one-by-one metre trapdoors in the second and first floors. After the motor had been taken down, the first floor trapdoor was closed but the second floor trapdoor remained open.

Monks decided to check the filters on the spray dryer but, distracted by the job in hand, fell 12 feet through the trapdoor onto the floor below, suffering serious injuries.

The court was told that Lancashire Chemical Works failed to take sufficient measures to prevent a fall from height during the work Monks was carrying out. In mitigation, the company said that it had introduced a series of safety measures since the accident.

These included inserting a smaller trapdoor on the second floor, which would still be big enough to pass the motor through without a worker being able to fall through it. The company has also installed a harness connected to the wall via purpose-built fittings for workers to wear when the trapdoor is open, preventing them from falling through it. Speaking after the case, investigating HSE inspector Mike Nind said: "This was an extremely nasty injury which could easily have been fatal. Every year people working at height lose their lives or suffer serious injury. No formal procedures were in place at this company before the accident, with reliance being placed upon the experience of employees to undertake this work safely. Firms, contractors and their clients need to exercise sufficient control to prevent this sort of thing happening - including carrying out a proper risk assessment."

PAINTER 'LUCKY TO SURVIVE' LADDER FALL

A Hampshire building contractor was in court recently after a painter was lucky to survive a 16-foot plunge from an unsecured ladder.

Drew Smith Limited was fined £20,000 under Section 3(1) of the HSWA and ordered to pay out £5,788 in costs as a result of the incident, which happened in October 2005. Lyndhurst Magistrates' Court heard that self-employed painter Paul Ramsden, 41, had been hired by the firm to paint five council-owned terraced houses in Southampton.

After he had finished painting one of the buildings, Ramsden (who was standing on a 16-foot extension ladder) began to take down a roof ladder he had been using. However, the roof ladder jarred against a vent pipe, pushing over the unsecured extension ladder and sending Ramsden crashing to the ground.

Prosecuting, HSE inspector Frank Flannery told the court that if a gardener had not found Ramsden and raised the alarm, he would have died. As it was, Ramsden suffered multiple serious injuries, including a broken elbow, pelvis and leg.

Flannery said that the accident happened because Drew Smith Limited failed to risk assess the painting work adequately. Although the company had drawn up a generic risk assessment for a wide range of council-owned properties throughout Southampton, it had not considered each building individually.

A suitable risk assessment would have shown that it was dangerous for Ramsden to use a ladder as a work platform, even if it had been secured. Instead, Flannery told magistrates that the work should have been carried out from a tower scaffold.

However, he said that the manager in charge of the project was not competent to undertake the risk assessment as he had not been given any safety training. "This accident was not the result of the actions of an individual," said Flannery after the case. "Rather it is the result of systematic failures, which gave rise to the circumstances in which the incident occurred.

"Most accidents are preventable, and we urge all contractors to ensure that work at height is planned, supervised and carried out in a safe way. Workers should be trained and competent. This case is a reminder to all those in the construction industry of their legal duty to manage health and safety."

Drew Smith Limited (which pleaded guilty) said it accepted that its procedures had been unsuitable; adding that it now ensures that project managers are given safety training

*Sources: HSE/HSC website, trade publications.
All information detailed is to provide guidance only.*