

Changing Negative Attitudes to Safety in Builders Merchants

Health and safety may not be a favourite topic of conversation in a builder's merchant. Once a negative perception of health and safety becomes embedded among your workforce, it is not easy to shake it off.

But amid a climate of changing legislation, 'new' sentencing guidelines, and the ongoing uncertainty of Brexit, it is more important than ever that managers and merchant owners find a way to bring their entire staff in line with the latest safety procedures for merchants.

How do you change attitudes towards health and safety in your workplace?

It's not easy to change attitudes towards health and safety, particularly on sites where there has been a history of cutting corners by avoiding safe working practices. However, for merchant owners and senior managers, the stakes could not be higher.

More and more builders merchants are subject to Environmental Health Officer 'topic inspections', tasked by the HSE to reduce accident statistics, and fines are being levied even in cases where an injury or accident has not yet occurred.

In 2016 alone, the top twenty health and safety infractions amounted to [more than £38.5m in fines](#). In fact, the average fine has risen by a massive [148 per cent](#), thanks to the 'new' sentencing guidelines taking a tough approach and fining merchants proportional to turnover.

Health and safety wins are rarely quick and easy, but embracing a health and safety culture can help to future-proof an organisation. But before any new action is taken to change attitudes towards builder's merchant's safety, you can expect to encounter a few challenges.

- An unwillingness to change attitudes: One of the chief challenges for managers can be convincing boots-on-the-ground workers to adapt to new working practices, especially if there is a history of 'this is how things have always been done'.
- Poor understanding of time requirements: Generating a robust safety culture will be time intensive for management.

- No useful action taken: Anyone can pay lip service to health and safety, but unless you try to steer genuine useful practical improvements in working practices then employees will not engage and no effective cultural change will be achieved.

Eight ways to tackle health and safety attitudes right now.

There are a few things that every business owner can do right now to encourage a change in the safety culture of your merchant.

1. Management lead by example: This could be as simple as consistently wearing high-visibility clothing, safety boots, or stopping mobile phone use while in the yard.
2. Consulting staff: Managers should consult with employees to learn more about their tasks and any concerns that they may have about new or emerging risks on site. Listening to staff to understand their job and the pressures they face may help in formulating safety improvements that are practical to implement.
3. Aim for consistency: A consistent approach to health and safety will help to reinforce positive behaviour. Start by securing a clear commitment from management before encouraging all staff to invest in safety in some small way on a daily basis.
4. Staff training: In order for staff to value their training it shouldn't just be treated as a 'tick box exercise'. Carrying out periodical refresher sessions can help ensure that bad habits are eliminated and best practice sticks. Focus particularly on higher risk work activities or areas where there is a higher turnover of staff.
5. Commit to fairness: Any health and safety policies need to be sensible and proportionate, and should never be perceived as a cover for cost-cutting, or validating unpopular policies. As HSE chairman Jonathan Rees said: "health and safety is not about long forms, back-covering or stifling initiative. It's about recognising real risks, tackling them in a balanced way and watching out for each other. It's about keeping people safe, not stopping their lives".

6. Follow through: Any missed steps can potentially be catastrophic, and this is a particular concern when it comes to safety equipment. Managers need to make sure that any safety equipment or personal protective equipment is fit for purpose. A recent TUC report found that 29 per cent of women found their safety equipment to be poor fitting and uncomfortable – raising the risk of injury as a result. Management need to be open to change and prepared to enforce change fairly when confronted with an attitude of ‘we’ve always done it this way’ even through disciplinary procedures if need be.
7. Commit to genuine results and progress: All too often the role of ‘H&S Manager’ is allocated to a manager just to tick a box and ease the burden on the Managing Director without providing adequate training, a budget or necessary support for that role. Training managers for the roles they are given empowers them to build their competence, and helps your organisation avoid the price of accidents in terms of injury, fines, and reputational cost. It is also important to learn from accidents, near misses and safety performance indicators to bring about continual improvement.
8. Take a proactive approach: It is no longer viable to simply react to accidents as and when they occur. Taking a proactive approach can actually benefit your business, as you will save time and money in the long term and reinforce your company’s health and safety culture.

By John Southall – SHP On-Line

Ladder Fall: £850k Fine After Window Installer Breaks Knee Cap

A window installer fell three metres from an unsecured ladder, breaking his knee cap, an investigation has found.

The accident happened when the worker was attempting to install a first-floor rear bedroom window of a property on Cemetery Road, Doncaster.

Slipped

Employed by H.P.A.S Limited (trading as Safestyle UK) at the time of the accident on 1 March, 2017, the operative was climbing a ladder that was not footed or tied and it slipped. He fell and sustained injuries which required surgery.

The HSE’s investigation found:

- The company’s system for planning work at height was inadequate in that it failed to ensure that work was carried out in a safe manner

- Operatives were left to their own devices.
- Windows were not routinely installed from the inside.
- Ladders were used in a way that constituted serious risk.
- There was no system of monitoring or supervision in place.

Guilty

At Sheffield Magistrates’ Court, H.P.A.S. Limited trading as Safestyle UK, of Style House, Eldon Place, Bradford, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 4(1) of The Work at Height Regulations 2005 and was fined £850,000 with £1,083 in costs.

Commenting after the hearing, HSE inspector Stuart Whitesmith said: “This incident could easily have been prevented had the company implemented reasonably practicable precautions.

“Such precautions include having effective and enforced safe systems of work, whereby windows are installed internally where possible, or by using suitable access solutions which provide edge protection, and having a formal system in place to ensure works are appropriately supervised.”

HSE Urges Employers to Think Again Before Investing in Off-The-Shelf Manual Handling Training

Off-the-shelf manual handling training should become a thing of the past, according to new advice released by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

New musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) advice has been issued by HSE to help employers to decide what type of help they need to tackle the MSD risks in their workplace. The web-based advice illustrates different approaches with examples and identifies who may be able to help address their needs.

The web based advice has been developed with the input and involvement of businesses, trade unions, trade bodies, training providers, professional bodies and safety professionals and consultants.

Launching the web-based advice at its inaugural MSD Summit on Wednesday, HSE’s Health and Work Portfolio Manager Geoff Cox said: “Our research shows that simplistic training involving bending your knees to lift a cardboard box is just a waste of time and money, it just doesn’t make any difference.” “The overall aim is to avoid and reduce manual handling, and that’s where employers should start if their workforce faces manual handling risks.

Don't start with training, start with re-organising and redesigning your working practices." "If you do need staff training, and there are many residual risks where this is the case, then this needs to be customised and professionally delivered. Any such training should be based on observations of current working practices, and should be informed by the views and experience of the workforce."

Organisations involved in developing the web guide included EEF, Unite the Union, ROSPA, IOSH and BSIF among many others.

Terry Woolmer, Head of Health and Safety Policy at EEF said: "The new web-based advice won't tell you how to resolve your MSD issues but it will help you decide what types of approaches suit your business and where to get the help you need."

National Health and Safety Advisor for Unite the Union, Susan Murray said "The key point from the web-based advice is the importance of involving workers in all aspects dealing with manual handling solutions – the people who do the work often come up with the best answers."

Health and Safety Consultant at RoSPA, Roy McKee said: "The web-based advice recognises training has a place in the hierarchy of controls for manual handling and also its limitations. It allows the risk profile of the company to dictate the level of competence and extent of help necessary rather than a person's accreditation or qualifications.

Where previously, SME's might not know where to go for assistance in ergonomic interventions or workplace designs, hopefully the web guide will change this."

Commercial Director at Pristine Condition, Phil Bladon said: "The web-based advice should make employers think about what sort of help they need. Where a training need is identified, it's now broadly accepted that conventional approaches aren't particularly effective.

Instead, the training must be practically-orientated, relevant and engaging for the individual, making it more likely that it's adopted at the "coal face", and critically, be part of a far more comprehensive system for changing manual handling behaviour in the long-term."

Chief Executive Officer of the BSIF, Alan Murray: "It's simple and straightforward – the web-based advice should set businesses in the right direction."

The full web-based advice can be viewed at www.hse.gov.uk/msd/external-help.htm

Construction Company Worker Suffers Life Threatening Injuries

A construction company was sentenced today for safety breaches after a worker suffered life threatening injuries.

Sheffield Magistrates' Court heard that, in September 2016, a 48-year-old employee of K. D. S. Construction Company Ltd was working in a 2-metre-deep excavation when he was struck on the head and pinned down by a large segment of concrete. He suffered multiple injuries, including fractures to his skull, ribs, left arm and vertebrae.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the construction company had been contracted by Abbey Forged Products Limited to carry out groundworks for the installation of a new underground water drainage system at the company's Beeley Wood Works site in Sheffield.

The investigation also found that KDS employees had dug out a number of excavations for the new tanks and pipework. After one tank had been installed, work started on another excavation for a second tank adjacent to the first. While this was being dug, one of the ground workers was asked to cover over some pipework which was sticking out of the first tank to protect it from being damaged by backfill. When he descended into the excavation to do this, a section of unsupported concrete which was overhanging the excavation broke off and fell onto him.

K.D.S. Construction Company Ltd of Taylors Court, Rotherham pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £70,000 and ordered to pay costs of £4,016.15.

After the hearing, HSE inspector Alison Outhwaite commented: "The employee's injuries were life changing and he could have easily been killed. This serious incident and devastation could have been avoided if basic safe guards had been put in place.

"This case highlights the need to be aware of the risks of working in and near excavations. The groundwork industry need to appreciate the risks even where excavations are thought to be 'shallow' or the ground considered to be stable. As HSE guidance states. 'Any unsupported excavation will be safe ONLY if its sides are battered back sufficiently or if the excavation is in sound rock (HSG150).

"If a suitable safe system of work had been in place prior to the incident, the life changing injuries sustained by the employee could have been prevented."