

Figures Reveal Fall in Construction Inspections

Figures obtained by construction union UCATT have revealed a decline in the number of inspections that the Health and Safety Executive are undertaking on construction sites, with Scotland seeing the biggest reduction with a drop of 55.7% in inspections.

Brian Rye, Acting General Secretary of UCATT, said that the fall in inspection activity is "deeply troubling" adding that the HSE needed to explain the reason behind the drop.

UCATT made a Freedom of Information request to discover the number of proactive (unannounced) construction inspections being made by the HSE for the year 2014/15 and these figures were then compared to a previous request for the same information in 2012/13.

This revealed that the total number of HSE inspections for 2012/13 was 10,577 compared to 9,656 in 2014/15 a reduction of 8.7%. This decline in inspections came at a time when the construction industry was recovering from recession and activity was increasing.

The biggest reduction was in Scotland which saw a drop of 55.7% in inspections. There was also a decrease: in the North East 28.5%, North West 32.5%, the South East 19.6% and in Wales 3.4%. There were some English regions where the number of inspections increased and the overall reduction for England was 2%.

Brian Rye, Acting General Secretary of UCATT, said: "This fall in inspection activity is deeply troubling. The prospect of an unexpected knock on the door by a construction inspector is what keeps many employers on their toes. If employers believe that their safety procedures are not going to be checked this will lead to slackness and corners being cut. Workers could pay with their lives."

Construction is the most dangerous industry in the UK in 2014/15, 35 construction workers suffered fatal injuries.

Mr Rye added: "The HSE needs to explain what is behind the reduction in inspectors is this due to budget cuts or specific policies to reduce inspection activity? Construction workers deserve to be told the truth."

Aldi Fined £100k for First Health and Safety Conviction

Supermarket chain Aldi and contractors Wilkinson Maintenance have been fined after an unsecured smoking shelter was blown by the wind, injuring an employee.

Michael Simpson was taking a cigarette break outside Aldi's Faverdale distribution centre when a gust of wind picked up an unsecured smoking shelter, striking him and pinning him for a few seconds, it was heard in court.

Mr Simpson, received soft-tissue injuries to his back and both arms and still has nightmares about the incident more than a year later, the Northern Echo reports.

Prosecuting lawyer Ros Scott Bell, appearing on behalf of Darlington Borough Council, said the incident could have seen the employee seriously injured or, at worst, killed.

It was heard how Wilkinson Maintenance had moved the metal and perspex smoking shelter to install an emergency exit at the Aldi site. It was left unsecured with Aldi believing Wilkinson would take care of it, while Wilkinson believed it was Aldi's responsibility.

Both companies pleaded guilty to one charge under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Aldi was fined £100,000 and Wilkinson Maintenance was fined £20,000. Both were ordered to pay £5,000 in costs.

Aldi's lawyer Richard Matthews, QC, asked the court to consider the company's otherwise unblemished health and safety record as a mitigating factor.

He said: "I stress that it is a remarkable achievement to employ 27,000 and to have no previous convictions. "Following the breach they conducted a swift investigation and every maintenance manager has been given training in relation to it."

Wilkinson's lawyer, Matthew Kerruish-Jones, said the company would like to publicly apologise to Mr Simpson. He said: "As far as mitigation is concerned, there were no aggravating factors and there has been a high level of cooperation between us and the prosecution."

Judge Simon Bourne-Arton, QC, said the “impeccable character” of both defendants would be considered when setting fines.

Designers Must Consider Health and Safety, IOSH Meeting Hears

Designers working on construction projects must consider how contractors will be kept out of harm’s way from the outset of their planning, a meeting of safety and health professionals heard.

Dougie Smith, health, safety and environment manager at infrastructure group Balfour Beatty, said principal designers and contractors have equally important roles to play in co-ordinating health and safety.

He said that under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM), which came into force last April, designers “must take all reasonable steps” to assist all those working on the project comply with the regulations.

Mr Smith was speaking at a meeting of the North East of Scotland branch of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH).

He told delegates that the CDM regulations are “not to be scared of” and that accident rates are falling in the industry, while occupational health is also being focused on.

After the meeting, he said: “Changes have been brought about as a result of the CDM regulations and it is important those working on construction projects are aware of them.

“In my presentation, I wanted to bring the regulations alive with some examples, to give a practical aspect to it. They are not to be scared of but they must be adhered to.”

The meeting was held in the Jurys Inn, Aberdeen, on the evening of Wednesday 10 February. Mr Smith told delegates – safety and health professionals who work in a variety of sectors – that, where possible, principal designers should get input from contractors during the design phase so they can anticipate possible health and safety problems early on.

If a contractor hasn’t been appointed, he added, designers can consult any contractor with relevant knowledge.

Mr Smith said that while the CDM regulations apply only to the construction industry, they are relevant to other sectors. The 2015 regulations, which replaced CDM 2007, created the need for a principal designer on projects to co-ordinate the pre-construction phase.

Donald Macfarlane, chair of the IOSH branch, said: “Construction is an industry where there are many risks to safety and health. But that does not mean that workers should not be safeguarded.

“It was very interesting to hear in the presentation how designers must consider this from the start of their work. It was relevant not just for our members who work in construction, but for those who work in other industries as well. Health and safety should be at the very core of everything they do.”

National Crane Company Fined £750,000 for Two Deaths after Collapse

A national crane hire company has been sentenced for failings that led to the death of two men as a crane collapsed in London. Southwark Crown Court heard crane operator Jonathan Cloke, 37, died after falling from the crane as it collapsed. It fell onto Michael Alexa, 23, a member of the public, and also killed him.

The court heard how sections of the tower crane, which was on a housing development in Thessaly Road, Battersea, separated when 24 bolts failed due to metal fatigue.

The 24 bolts were a significant safety feature on the crane’s slew ring, which connected the mast (tower) to the slew turret. This allows the arms of the crane (jib) to rotate through 360 degrees. When the bolts failed the slew turret and jib separated from the mast and fell to the ground.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation into the incident, in September 2006, found Falcon Crane Hire Ltd did not investigate a similar incident which happened nine weeks before, when the bolts failed on the same crane and had to be replaced.

HSE found the company had an inadequate system to manage the inspection and maintenance of their fleet of cranes. Their process to investigate the underlying cause of components’ failings was also inadequate. It told the court the particular bolts were a safety critical part of the crane.

The court also heard the bolts failing previously was an exceptional and significant occurrence, which should have been recognised by Falcon Crane Hire.

Lilliana Alexa, Michael’s mother, said on behalf of her family: “Michael was a lovely son, a wonderful big brother and a devoted father. His son has had to grow up without the love and support of Michael, who adored him. He was denied that opportunity because his life was taken away and with his, ours too.

"The memories of that day will never leave our family. We heard the crash and felt the ground shake. I found Michael and it's an image that haunts my nightmares. If only we had stopped to chat or parked the car somewhere else he would still be alive. We know we are not to blame but it does not stop us all feeling guilt.

"We cannot comprehend how our beloved son, brother, father and friend who was so full of life has gone. The whole crane industry must learn from our tragedy and the devastation it has caused. We do not want another family to endure the same pain of losing their child."

Mike Wilcock, HSE Head of Operations, said: "Jonathan and Michael's deaths were tragic, needless and entirely avoidable. These two men need not have died had Falcon Crane Hire taken the right, decisive action when the bolts failed the first time. The company fell far short of its health and safety obligation."

Falcon Crane Hire Ltd were fined £750,000 and ordered to pay costs of £100,000 for breaching Sections 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Etc Act.

Construction Firm Backs Occupational Cancer Campaign

Ensuring workers wear correct protective masks on building sites is one of the ways a major construction firm is supporting a campaign to tackle work-related cancer.

Willmott Dixon Group is among more than 60 organisations which have made a pledge to the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health's (IOSH) No Time to Lose campaign.

Pledgers agree to investigate whether any of their activities are increasing the risk of staff contracting cancer while at work and to put in place measures to reduce any risks.

Sean Brill, group health, safety and environment inspector at Willmott Dixon Group, said the firm was fully behind IOSH's drive.

They have been working with both Willmott Dixon Group staff and supply chain partners on the education of managers, supervisors and workers regarding the importance of wearing the correct levels of protective equipment and ensuring, where required, it is being worn and maintained correctly.

"We have been very encouraged by the response we have seen and feedback from workers has been very positive regarding both comfort and the reduction of inhaled dust," said Sean.

"We have been pushing forward at Willmott Dixon Group with stopping both staff and supply chain partners from wearing disposable paper masks. What we are now looking at is both wearing face-fitted masks which are suitable for the job to be undertaken."

Mr Brill, who is a chartered fellow of IOSH and a member of the organisation's Council, said it is important that firms view the health of their workforce in the same way they do their safety. He said: "As a group we felt it was time to stop whispering health and shouting safety. Both are very important as is the environment. It is vital we protect those who work for us from suffering long-term illness.

"Safety is immediate. The effects of something not being safe are seen and have immediate consequences. With health it is different; you often won't see the effects of exposure to something unhealthy until many years down the line."

The No Time to Lose campaign was launched a little over a year ago. It is alerting businesses and the people who work for them about the five most common causes of occupational cancer – exposure to diesel engine exhaust emissions, solar radiation, silica dust, asbestos and shift work – and how to take preventative action.

Organisations which have made a pledge are from different parts of the world and come from a variety of industries. Meanwhile over 120 organisations have endorsed the drive. For further details about No Time to Lose and to download the free campaign materials, visit www.notimetolose.org.uk.

Construction Safety Solutions Ltd

Introduction: The information provided here can help you keep up to date with the latest legislation, changes in working practices, HSE strategies and give examples of where some companies or individuals got it wrong.

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