



Wilkins Safety Group

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Welcome to our latest Update E-Newsletter

As ever, please feel free to share this with friends and colleagues. You will also find PDF versions of all our other newsletters on our website: www.wilkinssafety.co.uk with lots more useful information and a wealth of leaflets covering Health and Safety topics.



Are you scared of working at heights?

Falls from height are associated with more fatal and major/specified injuries to workers than any other kind of injury. In the UK in 2013/14 falls from height were the most common cause of fatalities, and the second most common cause of major/specified injuries; accounting for some 567,000 Lost Work Days.

So this week I thought we would look at working at height looking at the areas of risk, the fears some people have and their reasons for hiding these fears from others. I also consider what employers could do to reduce the number of falls from height.

We also have our regular pick of this week's HSE cases which both concern falls from height,

This week's 2 recent HSE cases look at falls from height.

- **Nikolajs Naumovs, 57**, fell five and a half metres to the concrete floor below **and died at the scene from head injuries.**
- **The 59-year-old employee** of Stormseal Roofing (Nationwide) Ltd fell through a roof light onto a mezzanine below. **He broke his pelvis, left shoulder and left elbow.**

As ever, if you have a subject that you would like us to cover one week, please contact us by phone [01458 253682](tel:01458253682) Email info@wilkinssafety.co.uk or via our [Facebook page](#) or by [Twitter](#)

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Older males the most likely victims!



Most fatalities occurred in construction, agriculture, facilities maintenance, and manufacturing, with older male victims being disproportionately represented. Ok so it is generally accepted that more men than women, work in the high risk industries for working at heights. But why the older male?

As part of our services I offer a scaffold inspection service, I know that it takes self-confidence to be able to work at a height. These days, even though I am still happy and able to walk scaffolds, I do not have that same level of confidence that I used to have, probably because it is not something I do every day.

In the workplace, it is also true that many people assigned to work at a height do not do it every day, which could mean their confidence levels are not that high, even if they are not scared of heights: those people who are fearful of heights are very unlikely to feel confident when placed in any height situation at any time.

Although not specified by HSE, the opportunities for a fall from height are greater when ladders are used, when people ascend/descend steps and stairways, when sheeting/roping on lorry trailers, climbing out of lorry cabs, and working on structures without leading edge protection.

Acrophobia

Most people are scared of something (spiders, snakes, etc.) with many people being scared of heights, and some being extremely fearful (**Acrophobia** from the Greek: *ákron*, meaning "peak, summit, edge" and *phóbos*, "fear").

When someone is fearful, they tend to focus solely on the object or situation that is scaring them, to the exclusion of anything else. As long as the person holds the fear in check, it can lead to continuous risk assessment as they try to ensure their safety. If unchecked, the person's estimate of the danger increases exponentially, to the point that anxiety and distress can cause them to freeze and/or become a danger to themselves and others such as running to escape even though high up on a scaffold.

This can manifest itself at any time. Indeed I know an ex roofer who, having worked happily on roofs all his working life, suddenly at age of 46 had an attack of acrophobia and froze on the roof and had to be helped down. He has never felt safe enough to return to roofs.

Hiding of fears

In the workplace, there are many social pressures that lead people to hide their fears. As such, it is highly likely that some fall victims are people who have hidden their fear of heights from their workmates and managers, perhaps because of 'perceived mickey taking' or fear of losing their job.

So what can you do to help?

One way that may help reduce the number of falls from height could be to identify those who are fearful of heights before allocating them



to such tasks. This could be done by HR during selection tests, prior to hire, assuming detailed job descriptions are available. At the very least, simply asking people if they are comfortable working at a height should become a recognised part of a risk assessment or permit-to-work process, particularly if they are over 50 years of age. It could also prove useful for incident investigators to explicitly explore the possibility that a fall from height victim was height-fearful.

If you would like any further help or support, please please contact us by phone [01458 253682](tel:01458253682)
Email info@wilkinssafety.co.uk or via our [Facebook page](#) or by [Twitter](#)

Now to the latest HSE cases:

Firm in court after man died in roof fall

An Aberdeenshire business has been fined for serious safety failings after a man died when he fell more than five metres through a fragile roof.



Latvian national Nikolajs Naumovs, 57, had arrived in Scotland only two weeks before his fatal fall. He had been working on a roof at premises in College Bounds, Fraserburgh, owned by local butchery company Bruce of the Broch 1886 Ltd.

Peterhead Sheriff Court was told yesterday (18 Feb) that on 21 August 2009 Mr Naumovs was working with his nephew to remove asbestos cement sheets from the roof of a building. They had reached the roof using a telehandler, and, while the basket was on the ground

being unloaded, the two were sitting near the apex of the roof. Suddenly and without warning, the roof collapsed beneath them.

His nephew managed to grab something and was left hanging from a wall but Mr Naumovs fell five and a half metres to the concrete floor below and died at the scene from head injuries.

The court heard that Mr Naumovs and his son Juris had arrived in Scotland in early August to work and were staying with his other son, Vjaceslavs, and nephew Nikolajs Cernovs.

Both Vjaceslavs and Nikolajs were employed by the company which, although it was primarily a family butchers, was converting premises in College Bounds into residential property.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the evening before the incident the company's managing director had visited the property to plan the next day's work with the pair. Neither of the men had a thorough grasp of the English language. They formed the impression that they were to start removing the roof the following morning in his absence.

The two men appear to have further formed the impression that they could bring in additional workers to undertake this task, if required, who would be paid by the company for any work they did. Consequently they asked Nikolajs and Juris Naumovs to help dismantle the roof the next day.

The investigation concluded that the circumstances leading up to the fatal incident showed poor communication, a lack of instruction and supervision, the use of equipment which was not suitable for the task, and the work being carried out in a manifestly unsafe manner.

Although the men should never have been on the roof itself at all, as the telehandler being used was not suitable for this work activity, the company would have been able to intervene to stop the roofing work had there been more effective and regular supervision.

Bruce of the Broch 1886 Ltd, of Broad Street, Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, was fined £80,000, reduced to £60,000 after pleading guilty to breaching Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

Following the case, HSE principal inspector Niall Miller said:

“This tragic incident could have been avoided had the work been planned properly and carried out with the correct equipment.

“This type of work should ideally be undertaken without the need to directly access the roof, for example by using a Mobile Elevated Working Platform, or, if that is not possible, with safety measures to minimise the risk of falling such as crawling boards, fall arrest harnesses or netting.

“In addition, an employer needs to arrange suitable training and instruction to ensure that persons working there clearly understand not only what they are expected to do but also how they are expected to do it in order to ensure a safe system of work will be followed.

“In this case the difficulties arising from the language barrier resulted in fatal consequences.”

The risks associated with work at height, and fragile roofs in particular, are very well known, and HSE has produced substantial amounts of free advice to assist duty holders to comply with the relevant legislative and regulatory requirements.

Falls from height continue to be the most common cause of fatality to workers. In the year 2013/2014 they accounted for 29% of deaths reported to HSE, meaning that 19 workers lost their lives after a fall that year.

For advice about health and safety in the construction industry contact Jon Wilkins of [The Wilkins Safety Group](http://www.wilkinssafety.co.uk) on 01458 253682 or jon@wilkinssafety.co.uk

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Roofing firm in court after worker's fall

A Leicestershire roofing company has been fined after a worker fell more than three metres through a fragile roof light.



The 59-year-old employee of Stormseal Roofing (Nationwide) Ltd, who is from Nuneaton, was over-cladding an asbestos cement sheet roof at premises in Colwick, Nottingham, when the incident happened on 15 April 2013.

Nottingham Magistrates' Court heard today (18 February) he was working from a staging board repairing a damaged sheet when he fell through the adjacent roof light onto a mezzanine below.

He broke his pelvis, left shoulder and left elbow.

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found that Stormseal's normal method of work was to install netting beneath the roof to stop anyone if they fell. However, the mezzanine underneath the area where they were working was used by the client to store tyres so nets were not used, but no alternative was provided.

There was a risk assessment and a method statement but they had been carried out by someone who had not had any formal training and were generic documents which lacked sufficient detail and did not accurately reflect the conditions on site.

Although Stormseal had contracted a local scaffolder to erect perimeter edge protection around the building, it did not extend around a section of the main roof exposing workers to the risk of falls of around six feet to a lower section.

Stormseal Roofing (Nationwide) Ltd, of Oaks Way Industrial Estate, Station Road, Earl Shilton, was fined £16,000 with £1,783 costs after admitting a breach of Regulation 4(1) of the Work at Height Regulations.

After the hearing, HSE inspector Linda-Jane Rigby said:

“The risks associated with work at height on or near fragile materials are well known, as are the controls needed to address those risks.

“Stormseal failed to identify the need for alternative measures for preventing or mitigating the consequences of a fall from the leading edge of either the staging boards or the newly-fitted roof sheets. As a result a man suffered painful injuries that could and should have been prevented.”

Work at height is the biggest cause of fatal incidents in the workplace in the UK, and the second biggest cause of serious injuries.

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- the links we supply are FREE,
- the helpline advice is FREE.

If you find this newsletter service of use and you think others might also find it useful, then kindly pass it on and ask them to subscribe for free, so they can continue to receive it in their own right.

Also contact us if you have a particular health and safety subject or question you would like covered



If you have any queries on any health and safety matter, please contact Jon Wilkins on [01458 253682](tel:01458253682) or by email on jon@wilkinssafety.co.uk



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