

Wilkins Safety Group



Weekly Update Newsletter

Welcome to this issue – Monday 17th March 2014 - of our Update Newsletter.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to colleagues and friends.

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This week we thought we would highlight a number of recent HSE reports. These are quite sobering but it is hoped that you can learn from the mistakes of others:

Working at Height



A ROOFING contractor put the lives of workers at risk by failing to protect them from falls as they worked on a barn roof near Bridgwater, a court has heard.

Neil Popham, 50, was hired to build agricultural buildings at a farm in Over Stowey. During the construction in May 2013, a complaint was made to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) about the safety of workers during the roof installation.

As a result, a HSE inspector visited the site and her investigation led to the prosecution of Mr Popham at Taunton Magistrates Court on March 3, 2014.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Kate Leftly, said: *"Falls from height remain one of the most common reasons for injuries and fatalities at work, and it is fortunate that no-one was seriously injured or killed in this case."*

"It's crucial that employers make sure work is properly planned, appropriately supervised and that sufficient safety measures are put in place to protect staff."

The court was told that on the day of the inspector's visit, three workers were on top of a steel agricultural building installing roof sheets. The roof height varied from seven metres to nine metres.

The inspector found there was no edge protection to prevent anyone falling off the building and inadequate netting to mitigate the effects of any fall. The workers had accessed the roof using a ladder that was not tied to prevent it falling.

Mr Popham had received enforcement notices relating to safe working at height on previous jobs.

Neil Popham, of Higher Heathcombe Farm, Enmore, near Bridgwater, pleaded guilty to a breach of the Work at Height Regulations 2005, was fined £5,000 and ordered to pay £950 in costs.

Manufacturing

Leading print firm's safety failures led to injury

A national printing company has been prosecuted for safety failings after a Leeds worker suffered a partial finger amputation because dangerous parts of a machine weren't properly guarded.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigated the incident at Polestar UK Print Ltd's factory in Whitehall Road, Leeds, on 12 February 2012.

Leeds Magistrates were told today (6 March) that the 55-year-old employee was injured as he attempted to remove a blockage from a magazine insert feeder machine.

He was removing debris from cogs within the machine when it unexpectedly started up again, turning the cogs slightly and creating a shear point. His right hand was caught and part of his first finger was sliced off. He has since been able to return to work.

HSE found the machine was not isolated from its power source and there were insufficient safety measures in place to prevent access to the dangerous moving parts.

It also identified Polestar UK Print Ltd had not provided a safe system of work for getting into the machine to clear blockages or to carry out maintenance. Access was via a side panel that should either have been interlocked to prevent the machine running when the panel was removed, or fixed into place with a special tool.

Polestar UK Print Ltd., of Apex Centre, Boscombe Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay £2,997 in full costs after admitting a breach of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

After the hearing, HSE Inspector Bradley Wigglesworth said:

"There is no excuse for companies to operate without protecting employees from dangerous parts of machinery. The requirement for guarding is well known and understood by industry.

"Polestar's failure to properly assess the risks or implement a safe system for isolation and lock-off had serious consequences. Had their guarding standards been of an acceptable standard, the worker's injury could have been avoided."

Fire & Explosion

Didcot manufacturer fined for acetone burn failings

A specialist manufacturer of vessels and pipework designed to carry liquid nitrogen and liquid oxygen has been fined after a welder was seriously burned during unsafe hot work.

The 38 year-old employee, from Oxford, who does not want to be named, was in hospital for a week and needed skin grafts after seriously burning his left leg in the incident at Didcot-based Thames Cryogenics Ltd on 23 January 2012.

An open bowl of acetone ignited as he used it to quench a hot work piece, spilling onto and through his trousers as he attempted to move the container outside.



The open bowl used to hold the Acetone that ignited

Thames Cryogenics was prosecuted today (3 March) by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) after an investigation identified that the acetone had been used for this purpose before – despite its highly flammable properties.

Oxford Magistrates' Court heard the acetone was intended for use as a degreasing agent, but that welders also cooled items in the open bowl.

It is unclear how often the quenching happened, although the company admitted in an interview that the bowl in question had been in place since 1986.

HSE established that Thames Cryogenics did not consider the use of large quantities of acetone – some seven litres – in an open container to be an issue, and that 600 litres of acetone were on the premises at the time of the incident.

The court was told that inspectors identified numerous issues with the company's safety management system, which resulted in three Improvement Notices being served to instigate changes. Following the incident, and in order to comply with the notices, smaller sealed containers were introduced for storing acetone for welders to use.

Thames Cryogenics Ltd, of Gooch Drive, Didcot, was fined £5,000 and ordered to pay £4,500 in costs after pleading guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

After the hearing, HSE inspector John Caboche commented:

“This was an entirely preventable incident that left an employee with serious and extremely painful injuries. Fortunately he was able to return to work, but he was reliant on painkillers for several months afterwards as the burns healed following his skin grafts.

“The standards governing the use of highly flammable liquids are well established and well known in industry, so it is difficult to comprehend how Thames Cryogenics could mistakenly believe that leaving an open bowl of acetone seemingly unchecked for a prolonged period – in this case several decades – was acceptable.

“The incident demonstrates the importance of actively managing health and safety and following health and safety advice and guidance where appropriate.

“The use of flammable liquids must be properly risk assessed and controlled in industrial environments.”

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As a company can you really afford not to take health & safety seriously?

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If you have any queries on any health and safety matter, please contact Jon Wilkins on 01458 253682 or by email on jon@wilkinssafety.co.uk



Your Business is
Safer in Our Hands