



News from



Award Health & Safety Ltd

Volume 4 Issue 8

August 2009

## Shattered Lives - Ladder Exchange Initiative 2009 is coming soon

**This year the Ladder Exchange Initiative will run from 1 September until 31 December 2009.**

The Ladder Exchange Initiative is simple; if you have a ladder which is bent, broken or battered you can part exchange it for a new one at any one of our partner outlets who are offering discounts on the sales of all ladders at very competitive rates. It also provides dutyholders with an opportunity to review pre-use checks, training, supervision and other arrangements for ladder work.

Over the last two years HSE has worked collaboratively with Local Authorities, and several partner outlets, to remove over 5,500 'dodgy' ladders from the workplace.. As a result of these successes, Ladder Exchange will now be an annual initiative.

During 2007/8 58 workers died and 3623 suffered a serious injury as a result of a fall from height. Ladders remain the most common agent involved and account for more than a quarter of all reported falls from height incidents. For more information [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

### Church pleads guilty to fire safety offences

A church organisation has been ordered to pay £30,000 in fines and costs after pleading guilty to breaches of fire safety legislation following a prosecution brought by London Fire Brigade.

The organisation – Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries International – pleaded guilty to three contraventions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Sentencing occurred on Friday 24 July 2009 at Woolwich Crown Court.

The Church held its services at Crabtree Manorway South in Erith. A prohibition notice was issued in June 2007 restricting to 600 the number of people on the ground floor of the premises.

But when the premises were inspected by the fire brigade in January 2008, around 1200 people were found to be in the main hall during a service. One fire exit could not be accessed as it was blocked by a steel bar, while another adjoining fire exit was chained and locked. The risk of an explosive and fast spreading fire was increased by what was described as the haphazard storage of 18 LPG and butane bottles and the use of naked flame heaters inside the main hall.

"It is regrettable that we had to bring this action against a charitable church organisation but there were significant fire safety failures," commented Steve Turek, assistant commissioner for fire safety regulation.

"These offences presented a real risk of injury to the congregation who are our main concern. Church groups and others which organise large gatherings need to make sure their premises are fit for purpose and that they take their responsibility very seriously to ensure the safety to visitors."



### Protecting your hands

Dermatitis is a very real issue for businesses across the UK, affecting everything from engineering and automotive, through to food, construction and hairdressing sectors, yet it is a workplace hazard that with consideration, provision of the right PPE and training is easily prevented. Work related dermatitis will apply to any workplace where irritant and allergenic materials are being handled.

*Irritant skin dermatitis* is the most common form of skin reaction and the most easily preventable. It occurs when some form of physical, chemical or microbiological interference causes the skin to become sore. A complete recovery from the dermatitis will generally be made through changing the work practices of the individual.

*Allergic skin dermatitis* can be caused by chemicals that have been added to materials that come into prolonged contact with the skin, mainly clothing and gloves. This is more serious and could prevent the sufferer from being able to carry out their job. Once an allergic reaction has been triggered, the person will have to avoid any contact with the substance permanently.

There are two aspects in defining how to prevent work-related dermatitis.

The first is through risk assessment. Identifying the hazards within the workplace and providing the right hand protection will go a long way to eradicating the dermatitis risk. Information on the ingredients that can cause dermatitis is contained within manufacturer's safety data sheets together with advice on which type of protection to use.

The second is for individuals to be aware of any allergic sensitivities that might apply solely to them.

One of the biggest problems with managing dermatitis risk is that it is not an immediate injury, but builds up over time.

Individuals who are at risk should be provided with information about what to look for, and encouraged to regularly check their skin for signs of dermatitis.

### Unaccredited gas fitter jailed for manslaughter

A gas fitter has been jailed for three years on manslaughter charges after two people died from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Cardiff Crown Court heard that Margaret Powell and Thomas Morgan died during the weekend of 16-17 December 2006, after inhaling toxic fumes emitted from a warm-air central-heating system, which had been serviced by Peter Tongue the previous month.

Tongue carried out the work at the premises in Port Talbot, Wales but failed to clean the boiler's flue, which siphons the combustible gas out of the system. Consequently, this area of the boiler became blocked by a build-up of the gas compound, and the carbon monoxide was pushed round the system and released through heating ducts in the floor of the property.

An investigation by the HSE discovered that although Tongue was correctly registered with CORGI (now Gas Safe Register), his accreditation to work on warm-air central-heating systems had elapsed.

**HSE inspector**, Hugh Emmet, told SHP: "Peter Tongue worked on Mrs Powell's gas central-heating system but his accreditation to work on that particular system had lapsed three years previously. As a result, his knowledge of the system was not up to date. Gas workers must take competency tests to work on these systems every five years and Mr Tongue should have been well aware of this."

The HSE also inspected four other properties that Tongue had worked on, which all had warm-air central-heating systems. The inspector found numerous faults in each of these and also discovered Tongue had failed to identify faults on a gas fire at one of the properties.

Tongue appeared in court on 30 July and was found guilty on two counts of manslaughter and six breaches of s2(3) of the HSWA 1974. He was given a three-year custodial sentence for each manslaughter charge, to run concurrently, but no further punishment was administered for the safety breaches. Inspector Emmet added: "This tragic case demonstrates why it is essential that gas engineers only work on appliances where their competence has been assessed and that they are on the Gas Safe Register."

### Worker fell through asbestos roof

A Wiltshire building company must pay £17,500 after an employee fell through a roof during demolition work.

Peter Flippance was working for Pewsey-based F Dewey demolishing buildings to make way for a residential development.

The 60-year-old, who was a plumber and not trained in demolition, had climbed on an asbestos sheeting roof with crawling boards and was removing the roof ridge, when the supporting timbers collapsed beneath him. He fell to the concrete floor, suffering a broken hip and wrist, and had to spend several weeks in hospital.

Flippance was unable to return to work for 11 months and now can only undertake light duties. Elizabeth Trzoska, prosecuting for the HSE, said the company had no safe system of work, had not carried out a proper risk assessment and failed to make arrangements to prevent carcinogenic dust spreading from the asbestos roof.

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### Broken chair costs council £10k

A council worker who slipped a disc and had to undergo back surgery after being forced to use a broken chair for nearly nine months has received £10,000 compensation.

Kay Fagg was working as a sheltered housing officer for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council when the castors of her chair stopped working early in 2003. Fagg complained to her employer, but she wasn't given a replacement.

"I was in constant raw pain from my back, after my disc collapsed and trapped a sciatic nerve," said Fagg, who has now retired from her job.

"After six months off work following my operation I finally had a risk assessment carried out.

"But it took them a year to sort out my office fully, which I am very angry about. I still have to take every day as it comes and do regular back exercises, as I don't want to lose the ability to walk."

Fagg's claim was supported by union UNISON.

"Kay Fagg's employers should have replaced her chair as soon as they realised there was a problem," said Ann Vinden, UNISON's head of local government in the Eastern Region.

"The solution was simple, but her injury was left to evolve, until it got so bad she had to have a serious operation and retire from a job that she loved.

"Employers must listen to staff, take health and safety checks seriously and resolve issues as soon as they start."

### Myth of the month

#### Myth: Health and safety law mean concert goers have to wear earplugs!

#### The reality

No, audiences don't have to wear earplugs! Going to noisy concerts is their choice. The laws are there to protect people who have to work in loud places.

Concert staff are at more risk of suffering hearing damage because they regularly work in high levels of noise. That is why employers should make sure they provide protection – this could be as simple as moving staff away from the noisiest areas, or providing suitable earplugs.

Hearing loss is preventable, so it's important to protect people to help them enjoy long and successful careers. The laws are there to control real risks to workers – not to take the fun out of concerts.

