

Worker deaths in Britain fall to record low

New figures released today reveal that the number of people killed at work in Britain fell last year to a record low. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has released the provisional data, which shows that 151 workers were killed between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 compared to 178 deaths in the previous year and an average number over the last 5 years of 220 deaths per year. **Judith Hackitt, the HSE Chair said:**

"It's really very encouraging to see a further reduction in workplace fatalities in the past year. This is performance which owes much to good practice, leadership and employee engagement. No doubt the recession has resulted in lower levels of activity in some sectors and a decrease in the numbers of new inexperienced recruits has also contributed to this fall in fatalities.

"We should also remember that 151 families are mourning the loss of someone who last year went out to work and never came home. Being one of the best health and safety performers in the world means continuing to strive to drive these numbers down further - not getting complacent about what we've collectively achieved and recognising the new challenges as we emerge from the recession." "As with all health and safety statistics, today's announcement is a combination of encouraging news about improvement but also a salutary reminder of the tragedies of lives lost at work."

Despite the overall improvement, agriculture, the most dangerous industry in Britain, has recorded a sizeable increase in deaths. 38 workers died on farms in the last year, marking a disappointing return to levels of earlier years after a record low of 25 deaths in 2008/09. Judith Hackitt added: "We are especially concerned to see the continuing high levels of fatalities in agriculture." "The fact that many of these lives have been lost in family businesses is a double tragedy. Not only have families been ripped apart, but businesses that have been handed down through generations have been ruined.

"No industry can or should regard high levels of workplace death and injury as being 'part of the job'. It doesn't have to be this way as many other sectors have shown by their improvement."



July 2010 - Action Mesothelioma Day 2010

The British Lung Foundation campaigns to raise awareness of Mesothelioma and to improve the treatment and care of people who are effected by it. This campaigning culminates each year on Action Mesothelioma Day (2 July)

Raising awareness of the risks of asbestos amongst tradesmen - those most likely to be exposed to it - is something HSE has campaigned on for several years. **Said Chair of HSE, Judith Hackitt,**

"HSE welcomes action to raise awareness about the dangers of asbestos and that is why, on Action Mesothelioma Day, we are supporting

the British Lung Foundation's call for people to 'be asbestos aware'. "Asbestos is not a problem of the past. It could be present in any building built or refurbished before the year 2000. In good condition, undisturbed and properly managed, asbestos does not pose a significant health risk. Those most at risk are tradesmen such as joiners, electricians and plumbers who routinely disturb the fabric of buildings as part of their work. Through our 'Hidden Killer' campaign we are working hard to help tradesmen appreciate that they are at risk and advise them on how to protect themselves. It makes eminent sense to also remind householders of the dangers they may encounter when doing DIY work themselves.

"We continue to work with a wide and diverse group of organisations and businesses to ensure asbestos awareness is fundamental to any trade where workers are at risk."

First aid failure contributes to £150k penalty

Rochdale plastics manufacturer TS (UK) has been fined £140,000 after a worker was crushed to death by a one-and-a-half tonne pallet of polypropylene. The company had no trained first aiders on site at the time.

On 15 July 2005, Portuguese cleaner Abel Lages was cleaning up a spill in the yard of TS's plant Stakehill Industrial Estate in Middleton, Greater Manchester, when the pallet containing 55 bags of polypropylene granules fell from an unbalanced stack onto him. He died at the scene.

Manchester Crown Court heard that the firm, part of the Italian Tontarelli housewares group, ignored advice printed on the bags of plastic feedstock advising on their safe storage.

If pallets are stacked directly on top of bags of granules they can become unstable if the bags leak.

"The company didn't provide guidance about how to stack the pallets," said HSE inspector John McGrellis, "and no one trained in first aid was on duty to help try to resuscitate Mr Lages." "TS (UK) pleaded guilty to charges under Regulation 3 (2) of the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981, which requires employers to have an adequate number of trained first aiders available and under Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act for not protecting Lages.

On 7 July, the company was fined £140,000 and ordered to pay prosecution costs of £10,588. McGrellis said that since the incident TS has stopped stacking the pallets of plastic granules directly on top of each other.

Comet in the dock for store death

Electrical retail giant Comet has been fined **£75,000** after a contractor fell through a rooflight at its Wrexham store.

Comet Group Plc contracted Steven Smith, who was director of Wrexham Roof Services Ltd, to clear guttering and replace leaking rooflights at its store in Mount Street. Smith had sub-contracted Paul Alker, 33, to help carry out the repairs.

On 7 June 2007, Mr Alker was walking across the roof when he stepped on a rooflight and fell 25 feet on to the store floor. He sustained fractured ribs, a broken collarbone, and soft-tissue damage. He died in hospital five days later owing to his injuries. The HSE issued an Improvement Notice against Comet in August 2007, which



required the company to improve its contractor management systems. HSE inspector Debbie John revealed that Mr Alker hadn't been provided with any equipment to prevent falls, and no attempts had been made to cover the fragile rooflights. She said: "Comet failed to ensure that its contractor had taken steps to prevent falls through the rooflights, ultimately leading to the death of a worker." "The law is clear that companies must ensure contractors are competent to do the work they are hired to do, and they need to understand their responsibilities. A safe system of work must be agreed and the company should monitor contractors to make sure they undertake work safely, as agreed. My thoughts are with the family at this difficult time. Comet appeared at Mold Crown Court on 5 July and pleaded guilty to breaching s3(1) of the HSWA 1974. It was ordered to pay full costs of £24,446. In mitigation, Comet said it had no previous convictions and had fully cooperated with the investigation. It has subsequently reviewed its procedures for selecting and monitoring contractors. It now has a process in place to assess the competency of contractors and it also ensures that their on-site movements are monitored closely. In November 2007, Steven Smith was jailed for **two and a half years** in relation to the incident. He pleaded guilty to manslaughter, s37(1) of the HSWA 1974, and a further charge of attempting to pervert the course of justice for hiring safety equipment immediately after the accident and planting it at the scene. Inspector John concluded: "This incident could have been avoided if the rooflights at the Wrexham store had been protected and Mr Alker had been provided with appropriate safety equipment."

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Food factory boss admits seven fire breaches

A food factory manager has been fined **£14,000** after she admitted seven offences under fire safety legislation. London Fire Brigade inspectors discovered the failings during a visit to the New Kong Nam Food Production Company in Edmonton.

They issued Mong Liu, who runs the firm, with an enforcement notice requiring her to remedy the failings by 9 March 2009.

When inspectors visited the premises again in June 2009, after granting Liu an extension to the original compliance date, they found she had made some improvements but serious problems remained. A third visit two months later showed the factory still had no proper means of fire detection and there was no suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment.

The first storey fire escape route had no proper fire protection, despite people sleeping on that floor; and windows to the alternative escape route were not fire resistant. Liu had no emergency plan in place, and could produce no evidence of fire safety training. Magistrates in Enfield fined Liu, as the responsible person at the premises, **£2000** for each of seven offences under the Fire Safety Order and ordered her to pay **£6380** costs.



Myth of the month

Myth: Health and safety brings candyfloss to a sticky end

The reality

Come the summer sun and what tops off a great day out better than good, old fashioned candyfloss? But if you believe some newspaper headlines this beloved sweet treat is under threat – because of the dangers posed by the stick it is spun around.

The truth is that there are no health and safety laws banning candyfloss on a stick. Is the traditional form of this sweet disappearing because it is easier to mass produce and store it in plastic bags? Who knows, but it certainly isn't health and safety leaving anyone with a bad taste in their mouth.

