



Birmingham Health, Safety & Environment Association

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Newsletter

December 2008

Welcome to Our New Members

- David, Maloney, Health & Safety Officer, Swift Building Services (Midlands) Ltd
- Robert Cooke, Director, SRC Group Ltd.
- Robert Hope, Consultant, BHPMS Health & Safety Services
- Pat Perry, Executive Chairman, Perry Scott Nash Associates Ltd.
- Nicholas Digger, Director, Laser Claddings Ltd.
- Ranbir Singh Bhorjee, Proprietor, R.S.B.Technocrats

Members' Corner

A presentation on the Safe Use of Quick-Hitch devices on Excavators.

Bob Cole, Morgan EST

Bob Cole introduced this topic by saying that his company had experienced five accidents with quick hitches in the past 12 months, fortunately with no injuries. Their



Photo 1: Semi-automatic type of QH (Safety pin about to be inserted)

experience was similar, however, to the pattern of 4 deaths in the same period, reported to the HSE, and his company had taken urgent action to prevent a re-occurrence.

The Quick Hitch is a latching device that is a convenient means of connecting attachments, like buckets, to the dipper arm of an excavator.

In order to maximise the productivity of the machine, a driver may operate this device as many as 30 times each day and the accidents occur when the device safety pin is inadvertently left out afterwards. As some attachments may

weigh up to ½ tonne, it is a high risk operation and HSE have recently reached an agreement that no more of these semi-automatic attachments will be supplied in the UK. However there are still many more already in use and it will be a continuing problem for some time to come.

There are several reasons for these accidents: -

- Poor operator training on the Hitch
- Inadequate supervision
- Poor Banksman training
- Workers entering into a machine's area of operation whilst it is moving



The problem may be partially overcome by an improved version of the device called a “Fully Automatic Quick Hitch”,

illustrated here. These are controlled from the cab and eliminate the need for the driver to dismount and it is often necessary to fully crowd or scroll the attachment to fully engage the safety device. However, on all types of Quick Hitch, it is still necessary to check correct engagement by taking the attachment through a full operational rotation at full speed. This is humourously referred to as a “Shake, Rattle and Roll” test that must be carried out in isolation to any other traffic or worker movements. A full visual examination to check engagement must be made after this test.

Scott Poppleton of Taylor Wimpey plc commented that his company had recently completed a similarly rigorous review of QH procedures, followed by intensive training of employees and contractors to ensure strict compliance on site. Although most contractors responded well to training and changes of procedure on site, he was very concerned that Utilities and their contractors did not take up the invitation for training and showed a lower standard of compliance.

Bob agreed that this was an unsatisfactory situation and said that the difficult task of bringing these organisations into compliance must continue in order to educate them.

Monthly Meeting 10th November 2008

Presentation on the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

Jonathan Herrick, West Midlands Fire Service

Jonathan started by referring to a remark Bob Cole had made about a cause of Quick Hitch accidents being due partly to “laziness” and said that this equally applied to causes of fire! He went on to say that last time he spoke to us he was responsible for

Fire Training, Building Design and Fire Engineering. Now, his duties had changed to Fire Safety Policy, Engineering and Training and he was going to take the radical approach, today, to start off his presentation by asking “Any Questions?”

John Wood, who is on the BHSEA Council, but is also the Chairman of the Dudley, Sandwell & Birmingham Fire Protection Association, took up the challenge immediately by asking why there were so many interpretations of the Order. Jonathan replied that was because there were no standard proposals in the Order and this meant that, inevitably, different officers would adopt different approaches in different types of business situation. With a risk based approach, the Action Controls would always be different, and he commented that the Order should have been more prescriptive, but the National, goal setting approach prevented that.

Mark Hoare of Birmingham University commented that they had received 10 Inspections in recent months which seemed to be excessive. Jonathan agreed and said that with 100,000 residences and 150,000 multi-occupied premises to visit, WMFS had employed a computer programme to prioritise their inspections. Unfortunately, it didn't do it very well, because as soon as a recent inspection report was processed, the computer allocated that organisation a higher risk rating and, consequently, scheduled another inspection. So, Jonathan added, he had sacked the computer and was developing a better system!

Jonathan went on to summarise the main parts of the order and said that the most significant part of the RRO for Employers was contained in Articles 8 – 22, which is why Officers sought an explanation of these controls during their inspections. Dalvinder Masau of Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust asked if there was a published Audit Form available. Jonathan said it was basically Articles 8 – 22 and the Secretary agreed to publish a list of the Article titles, as follows: -

- Article 8. Duty to take general fire precautions
- Article 9. Risk Assessment
- Article 10. Principles of prevention to be applied
- Article 11. Fire safety arrangements
- Article 12. Elimination or reduction of risks from dangerous substances
- Article 13. Fire-fighting and detection
- Article 14. Emergency routes and exits
- Article 15. Procedures for serious and imminent danger and for danger areas
- Article 16. Additional emergency measures in respect of dangerous substances
- Article 17. Maintenance
- Article 18. Safety Assistance
- Article 19. Provision of information to employees
- Article 20. Provision of information to employers and the self-employed from outside undertakings
- Article 21. Training
- Article 22. Co-operation and co-ordination.

On the subject of Hazard/Risk, Jonathan said that they were not defined well and he questioned the fire services approach following the Woolworths fire in Liverpool. Safety is the responsibility of the Occupiers, because the Fire Service is not in a position to know

how they work, on a day-to-day basis. If the Occupier thoroughly understands the risks involved then their risk assessments and controls measures should be appropriate. In large organisations, Management Audits are more necessary and need to assess arrangements for the whole organisation, not just isolated parts of it. Within the organisation WMFS would like to see responsibilities, within control limits for junior managers.

In this context, he went on to say that the National table on **Risk**, relative to **Types of Occupancy** was ridiculously inaccurate because false alarms in hospitals artificially elevated risk ratings and there was a lot of guesswork in the figures for consequences of fires. He added that in old Certificated premises which had a low risk rating and were not visited, despite there being an historically high incidence of deaths. He referred to the tables showing an apparent lull in Enforcement, Prohibition and Alteration Notices and remarked that these were distorted by underlying changes to gathering of statistics and the fact that Alteration Notices were introduced by the RRO.

On the subject of Management and lack of understanding of issues, Jonathan outlined the information requirements for employees and outside organisations who must understand your risks. He added that feedback to management from employees was often ignored, whereupon **Peter Evans** commented that most employees were not bothered and that this need to be overcome by training young people in the right way. Jonathan responded by mentioning the visits to schools and the Safeside Centre at Headquarters with 16 scenarios for realistic experiential learning. This uses Pester Power, whereby children will often advise parents to improve their fire precautions!

Fire extinguisher training was raised by a member and Jonathan commented that they should only be used on small fires in the early stages. The user had to understand the nature of fire development in order to respond effectively and safely. **Alan Phelps of Birmingham City Council** asked if video extinguisher training was adequate and Jonathan doubted it would replace the hands-on feel of the heat from a fire, the weight of the extinguisher and its response.

Jonathan conclude with some detailed observations on the apparent confusions and conflicts introduced by the RRO and said that they would doubtless lead to more debate in the future. Bob Cole thanked Jonathan for his provocative presentation and commented that the questions from the audience showed that it had been enjoyable for them as well. He asked Members to show their appreciation in the traditional manner.

Monthly Meeting 8th December 2008

BHSEA Chairman, Bob Cole, welcomed members to the meeting, especially new BHSEA member Ranbir Singh Bhorjee, who was attending for the first time. The Secretary announced apologies from BHSEA President Morris cooke, Gerry Mulholland, David Hughes, Tiny Hall, Dalvindar Masaun, Malcolm copson, Graham Kilford and Bill Parker.

Presentation on Safety at Home this Christmas

Simar Patel, Home Safety Unit, West Midlands Fire Service

Bob Cole thanked **Simar** for making this presentation at short notice, because the planned speaker was unable to be present. He went on to say that Simar had worked in the Home Safety Unit of West Midlands Fire Service for three years, as a non-uniformed officer.

Simar started her presentation by giving us the background to WMFS range of work in dealing with fires, Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs), burning Vehicles, Train Collisions, Disaster Rehearsals and Flood Rescue. Her photographs were graphic illustrations of the horrendous consequences of such accidents and this one serves to show how vulnerable car occupants can be when faced with only a small tree! She went on to say that the WMFS covered 2.6 million people, from 40 Fire Stations, staffed by 2,100 Firefighters. She and her colleagues in the Home Safety Unit focussed on fire safety in the home, because that is where the majority of deaths and injuries occur. Since 2004, she added, there has been a welcome reduction of 500 fires per annum in homes across the West Midlands area.

The high risk groups are: -

- Elderly
- Homes with young children
- Smoking households
- People with disabilities

Aggravating factors for these groups are: -

- Bedridden patients
- Alcohol
- Prescription and/or Recreational Drug use
- Pets.

The most common causes of fire are: -

- Smoking materials, where every three days, someone dies from a fire caused by a cigarette –
 - Frequently, smokers fall asleep in a chair with a lighted cigarette in their hand and this is aggravated after drinking alcohol. A wise precaution is to only buy furniture made with fire resistant materials. and NEVER smoke in bed!
 - Always keep matches and lighters away from children

Simar showed a video clip of a discarded cigarette on a carpet, where the subsequent fire spread with alarming speed.

- Cooking – 60% of all fires start in the kitchen, primarily from chip pans! Where this happens it is crucial to turn off the source of heat, as soon as possible. Do not, ever, attempt to extinguish fat fires by throwing water at them – the results are catastrophic and can cause horrific injuries as hot, burning fat is cascaded over the kitchen. Even the use of fire blankets, once recommended, is now discouraged as it can sometimes cause forearm burns in particularly fierce fires. The current advice is ***Get Out, Stay Out and call 999!***

- Electrical faults – these can occur in 13 Amp adaptors that can drop down in use and cause local overheating. Sometimes people place a succession of adaptors in tandem to obtain extra outlets and this places even more mechanical stress on the contacts, with the result that they overheat very quickly. Simar also emphasised the need to be very cautious about the excessive use of extension leads as these often become damaged and even posed hazards on escape routes in the event of fires. The golden rule is to use one plug per socket!

It is essential always to check that appliances are safe to leave on standby when unattended for any length of time, particularly overnight. It is also important to operate appliances correctly as items like fridges can overheat dangerously if a door is left open so that the motor tries to compensate by working continuously!

- Candles – these come in many forms and are used more often at Christmas time and Diwali, causing as many as five fires a day! Placing next to flammable materials like curtains that move around is a frequent cause as is placing underneath items, which can cause overheating over an extended period. Some special effect candles are designed with a metal baseplate, but it is important to realise that these plates get very hot when the candles burn down and can ignite wooden furniture. A simple remedy is to place them in a shallow ceramic dish and make sure that it was large enough! The golden rule is never to leave burning candles unattended in a room!

Simar added that placing of candles in unusual places could catch people by surprise when carrying out routine tasks, such as reaching for household objects. It is easy for the flame to contact clothing, very often with disastrous results.

- Naked flames in fires should always be guarded to prevent accidental contact with discarded flammable materials that may not be present at other times in the year. Natural coal and log fires should also be guarded to prevent sparks from flying out onto furnishings and other flammable materials.

Moving on to the topic of fire precautions, Simar mentioned the important issue of smoke alarms and said that 40% of properties do not have a working smoke alarm! The questions to ask yourself are: -

- Do you have at least one smoke alarm per floor?
- Are they fitted in the right place? (On the ceiling)
- Do they work? They should be tested once per week, the battery, if fitted, needs to be checked every 12 months, accumulated dust should be cleared every 6 months and the units replaced every 10 years.

This photograph shows the recommended positions for smoke alarms and it should be noted that they are not placed in bathrooms or kitchens because of the risk of nuisance tripping.



Simar then reinforced these principles with a case study about a fire fatality in a residential property. The learning points focussed on the massive accumulation of spent cigarettes and packets, the overwhelming obstruction of escape routes with furniture and household appliances and the crucial presence of an electrical extension lead across the exit route. It was this extension lead that fatally tripped the aged female occupant and there was evidence of blood from a head injury on a telephone. Every thing in the house indicated a high fire risk and militated against a safe escape from the almost inevitable fire!

Simar went on to describe the WMFS recommended *“Night Time Routine”*, as follows: -

- Switch off electrical appliances
- Carefully stub out cigarettes and, ideally, put some water in the bottom of ashtrays.
- Place outdoor keys in a convenient place to locate in an emergency, but not where they are immediately obvious to intruders.
- Remove obstacles like toys and bicycles from final escape routes.
- Ensure that a mobile phone is readily available
- Ensure that exit doors can be opened easily

On the subject of fire doors, Simar showed photos of both sides of a door to contrast the burnt-out room on one side with the untouched office on the other. She added that even non-fire doors could delay the spread of fire by about 15 minutes, so it was essential to keep internal doors closed to avoid a rapid spread. She warned that it was important to always test the temperature of the door with the back of the hand, before opening, to see if its temperature indicated the

presence of fire on the other side. Pets, she added, were often able to detect a problem before humans, so it was important to observe their behaviour as well!

Simar concluded by saying that it was important to devise an **“Escape Plan”**, and to make sure that all the household were familiar with it, well in advance of being caught in a fire. These are two she outlined: -

Plan A Not trapped by Fire	Plan B Trapped by Fire
Test the temperature of the door and, if cold, open it.	Test the temperature of the door and, if warm/hot, DO NOT open it.
If there is smoke present, crawl low to the floor	Block the gaps around the door
Get out of the house by the nearest downstairs door. When outside, telephone 999.	Shout “FIRE” until you get someone’s attention to phone 999
Wait for the Fire Service. NEVER go back in	Stand by the open window

Members' Questions

Mark Hoare of Birmingham University commented that the Mobile Support Demonstration Unit had been to talk to students in their halls of residence and was able to make use of realistic scenarios.

Bob Cole asked if the 10-year batteries were a standard fitting and Simar said that they were only in the units installed by WMFS.

Chris Peck of Birmingham City University asked what the life of the detectors were and Simar replied that they were about 8 years, with the Mains Units a little longer.

As there were no more questions, the chairman closed the meeting with a request to members to show their appreciation for a useful and interesting presentation.

Date of the next Meeting

2.00 pm on Monday 12th January 2009

at the Birmingham Medical Institute

BHSEA Annual General Meeting

Review of Progress

Steve Flanagan, Acting Head of Operations, HSE Midlands

Steve will make a first appearance at the BHSEA AGM to give us the HSE view about how 2008 has turned out and what we might expect to see in our sights for 2009

As usual, there will be a Buffet Lunch at 1.15pm

Be there early to avoid disappointment!