

Safe working demands the commitment of all

The information and support is out there to prevent deaths – now it's time for the industry to commit to better practices, writes *Peter Bennett*

We draft standards to regulate it, produce guidance on correct procedures, and train people to do it safely, but working at height still results in falls.

The latest figures available, for the year to March 2020, record that 29 people died and 5,214 non-fatal falls were reported under RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013). Significantly, it is thought only half of non-fatal accidents are actually reported, meaning the true figure may be much worse.

British industry, in every sector, is pretty resourceful when it comes to solving problems. Unfortunately, what it doesn't always fully consider is how problems can be resolved safely. As the figures show, the result can be death or serious injury, with shattering consequences for the individuals concerned, their families and colleagues.

According to Health and Safety Executive (HSE) research that cites investigations carried out by its inspectors, all accidents result from failures in one or more of three key tasks: planning, organisation and management.

"It's essential to take time and plan the work from the very start," says Ray Cooke, health and safety adviser to the No Falls Foundation (NFF), the UK charity I chair that is dedicated to preventing falls from height and to helping people affected by the life-changing consequences of a fall.

Supported and championed by the Access Industry Forum, the NFF has three principal objectives: raising awareness of



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the risks; researching the causes of falls; and providing advice and support to those affected by a fall.

High-level influence

We actively support the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Working at Height, which brings together parliamentarians, industry leaders and trade associations to campaign on the issue of safety at height. In June last year, the APPG took its proceedings online, focused on ensuring that the collaboration between government and industry we have seen on workplace safety during the pandemic continues in the area of working at height.

The NFF also continues to advocate for a more comprehensive system of recording falls from height – as recommended by the APPG's 2019 official inquiry report, *Staying*

Alive, to better inform future policy and decision making. This year will see work done to frame a research project to investigate the current issues around accident reporting, exploring how enhanced reporting might assist.

The charity has also just launched a support and information pack that gathers together advice and assistance for people affected by a fall from height. The pack covers a wide range of topics including what to do immediately; what financial assistance may be available; how to begin a personal injury claim; support with transport and home adaptations; using the No Falls Befriending Service; and organisations that can help with issues of mental health.

As NFF manager Hannah Williams puts it: "What should have been a perfectly normal day has ended in a potentially life-

shattering accident. What do you do now? Who can you turn to? What help is available? The pack attempts to answer these questions and provides contact details for the charity."

Urging an industry pledge

Looking ahead, this year will see the NFF begin a landmark project with the creation of the No Falls Charter, an initiative that brings together best practice from existing regulations, policies, standards, guidance and a wide range of industry bodies. Intended for adoption and implementation by industry at large, it will enable companies to make a tangible commitment to height safety, and to make that commitment both transparent and demonstrable.

The charity is also inviting people to share their personal stories about falls from height and their consequences. The aim is to develop a series of case histories to highlight the circumstances and aftermath of these incidents. No one expects a fall to happen to them, but these stories prove anyone can be affected.

Cooke, an ex-HSE inspector, says working at height can be carried out safely: "It simply needs to be properly risk assessed, planned, supervised, and undertaken by competent people using the right equipment."

Peter Bennett OBE is chair of the No Falls Foundation, a charity established in 2018. The NFF publishes a bimonthly e-newsletter, *Saving Lives*, which contains details of all the latest news and developments at the charity. Sign up at nofallsfoundation.org