
Construction Fatalities Surge 70% Above Pre-Pandemic Levels

Description

In a disturbing trend, fatalities among construction workers in the UK have surged by 70% compared to the period before the Covid pandemic. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) released its latest annual statistics, revealing that 51 construction workers lost their lives in accidents over the year leading up to 31 March 2024. This alarming figure represents 37% of all industry-related deaths surveyed.

Across various industries, workplace fatalities have remained relatively consistent with pre-pandemic levels, according to the HSE. However, construction stands out with a stark increase. The 2023/24 data shows a 70% rise in construction worker deaths compared to the 2018/19 period, the last full year before the pandemic.

While the number of fatalities fluctuates year-on-year, the average number of worker deaths in construction in the latest two years is statistically significantly higher than the pre-pandemic period, noted the HSE.

A Grim Comparison Across Industries

In 2023/24, construction fatalities were more than double those in the next most affected industry, which includes agriculture, forestry, and mining, with 23 reported deaths. This figure also surpasses the five-year annual average of 42 fatal injuries among construction workers.

The HSE's report includes fatalities from work-related accidents that were required to be reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases, and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations. Falls from height emerged as a significant concern, accounting for 50 deaths across all industries, up from 41 the previous year.

The 2023/24 figure for fatal falls from height now sits at an unacceptable 35% above the five-year average of 37, stated the Access Industry Forum (AIF) in a recent announcement.

These statistics were released shortly after Construction News highlighted a significant decline in the number of HSE investigations into falls from height.

Ruth Wilkinson, head of policy and public affairs at the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), emphasized that this rise is significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. She expressed deep concern, noting that lessons aren't being learned and that much more still needs to be done to protect workers.

The entire workforce recorded 138 deaths, marking a slight increase from the previous year. Additionally, 87 members of the public lost their lives due to workplace incidents, a rise of 14 compared to 2022.

The most common fatal accidents in construction were:

- **Falls from height:** 50 deaths
- **Struck by a moving vehicle:** 25 deaths
- **Struck by a moving object:** 20 deaths
- **Trapped by something collapsed or overturned:** 15 deaths
- **Contact with moving machinery:** 8 deaths

Wilkinson voiced her concerns: “This is a huge concern, and we need to see action taken to tackle this. Whichever party forms the new government must seek to protect and enhance health and safety standards, particularly across high-risk industries like construction.”

She also highlighted the need for businesses to adopt robust health and safety management systems. “Providing a safe and healthy working environment isn’t just an add-on for a business. It is now a fundamental principle and right at work, as recognized by the International Labour Organization. So, we need to see a joined-up approach to tackle harm at work to prevent more lives being needlessly lost.”

The Construction Sector’s Elevated Risk

The rate of fatal injuries in construction is alarmingly high, standing at five times the all-industry average. Despite a reduction in overall injury numbers, the increase in fatal injuries is a pressing concern.

“Despite a decrease in the overall number of injuries, it is worrying to see that the number of fatal injuries in the [construction] sector has increased compared to the previous year,” said Kathryn Hart, a serious injury partner at Lime Solicitors. “This highlights the urgent need for enhanced safety measures and stricter enforcement of regulations to protect the lives of workers in this high-risk sector.”

With a new government set to take office, Hart emphasized the necessity for immediate action. “Our leaders must take urgent action to improve protections for all those in the construction sector and ensure that workers’ safety is put first,” she added.

Calls for Better Reporting and Prevention

AIF chair Peter Bennett has advocated for a simplified system of reporting workplace accidents, particularly falls from height. “The latest HSE fatal injury figures paint an overwhelmingly bleak picture,” he said. “It’s clear something isn’t working. Most falls from height are avoidable, but only if we can understand what’s causing them in the first place.”

Bennett criticized the current reporting processes, which focus on the type of incident rather than its cause. “This needs to change if we are to tackle the worsening issue of workers being killed, and the number of people who suffer the life-changing consequences of a fall from height,” he insisted.

The Urgent Need for Vigilance

Julie Riggs, director of education and membership at the British Safety Council, reinforced the critical nature of maintaining rigorous health and safety standards. “The rise in work-related fatalities in the latest HSE report serves as a stark reminder that we cannot become complacent about the health and safety of workers. Put simply, the consequences of poor health and safety are too great a price to pay,” Riggs declared.

The data presents a clear message: the construction industry must prioritize safety and enforce stricter regulations to prevent further loss of life. The increase in fatalities calls for immediate and decisive action to protect workers and ensure their safety in one of the most dangerous industries.

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1. United Kingdom

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