

Employees urged to take care when working at height

7 workers killed so far this year in height related accidents

21st August 2009

The Health and Safety Authority has today issued a warning to workers to take appropriate precautions when working at a height. The warning comes as the Authority revealed that there have been 7 workers killed as a result of a fall so far this year, with 5 of these occurring in the construction industry.

Last year there were 15 construction related deaths in total, with 3 of these as a result of a fall from height. Expressing concern at the increase, Martin O'Dea, Senior Inspector with the Health and Safety Authority said, "Compared to last year, there has been a significant increase in deaths as a result of a fall. Most of the accidents have involved falls from roofs and ladders. Unsecured ladders are particularly dangerous and I would urge workers to organise and plan their work with their safety and health in mind. It's also very important that workers only use equipment that is suitable to the job."

Accidents involving falls from a height are not confined to the construction sector but construction workers are particularly at risk due to their extensive use of ladders, scaffolding and other working at height equipment. The construction sector has seen major improvements in health and safety management in recent years and it is vital that these standards are maintained.

"The industry has undoubtedly worked hard to reduce the rate of accidents since the early 90's and this focus must be maintained," said O'Dea. "Working at a height is a dangerous activity and the appropriate planning and safe systems of work must be used. Employers have a legal duty to do all that is reasonably practicable to ensure the safety and health of workers is protected and workers themselves must also take personal responsibility and not do anything that could jeopardise their safety or the safety of others," he added.

Advice for employers and employees in relation to working at a height includes:

- Avoid the activity in the first place if possible
- Use suitable work equipment to prevent falls where working at height is unavoidable

- Take account of weather conditions
- Ensure that those working at height are adequately trained
- Be aware of the potential for falling objects on those working at lower levels or on the ground.

The Authority has published guidance on the General Application Regulations 2007 Work at Height provisions, safe use of work platforms/trestles and safe use of ladders. There is also a code of practice for roof workers and working on scaffolds. These publications give very practical information and advice and are all available for free download from www.hsa.ie.