

HSE spot checks failed by 40% of construction sites

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According to the HSE, during their most recent month-long initiative of spot checks, poor standards and/or dangerous practices were found at 40% of the construction sites visited. One in five sites had practices so poor that enforcement action was deemed necessary, and 313 prohibition notices and 235 improvement notices were issued. The most common issues related to work at height and falls (42% of all enforcement notices were served for this reason), failure to control dust, insufficient welfare and asbestos. Inspectors had to order work to stop immediately because of dangerous practices involving work at height on more than 200 occasions.

The HSE also noted that health implications through exposure to harmful dusts were often overlooked because the effects were not immediately visible, and urged construction firms to ensure that basic measures such as protective equipment and dust suppression methods were put in place. In particular behaviour needs to be changed on small projects, where over half the construction industry's fatal injuries occur.

What this means for you

The results demonstrate that the construction industry still has a long way to go in terms of ensuring workplace safety, particularly on smaller projects. Construction companies need to be aware not only of more immediate risks, but also of their longer-term liability in connection with workers' exposure to harmful dust. With the retention of FFI and proposed increased penalties in the courts, companies found to be in material breach of their health and safety obligations may well have cause to regret not taking the simple steps which would protect their workers and members of the public.