



# Workshop wellness

**Failure to treat workshop safety with respect not only risks significant fines and jail sentences, but also some serious injuries and possibly even fatalities. Steve Banner explains**

**B**reaching workplace health and safety rules can result in disaster – and even well-run operations are not immune. Last year saw van and truck group Imperial Commercials ordered to pay £212,500 in fines and costs by Warwick Crown Court after one of its employees was killed by a truck. Craig Stewart Dunn was crushed at its Wellesbourne, Warwickshire site while working outside. The truck's front grille was raised – not the first time this practice had been adopted – which meant the driver could not see what was immediately in front of him.

“The tragic, needless loss of Mr Dunn’s life could have been prevented had Imperial properly considered the risks from the movement of HGVs at the site and provided effective segregation of pedestrians from moving vehicles,” comments HSE (Health and Safety Executive) inspector Mark Austin. “Even though the vehicle that crushed him was

travelling at less than 5kph, its size and weight left him no chance of survival. Companies working with vehicles of all sizes need to ensure that all pedestrians are able to circulate and work safely at their premises at all times.”

## **SAFE PRACTICE**

Even apparently minor miscalculations can result in serious injuries and fines. In 2015, Bradford-based truck repairer and refinisher Paintshop was fined £4,000 plus £991 costs after pleading guilty to an offence under Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. The firm was prosecuted when an employee suffered a serious fracture to his left leg after a vehicle suspension arm being transported by forklift in an unsafe fashion fell on it.

Workshop managers beware. Since 1 February this year, fines for health and safety offences have become a lot tougher, thanks to new guidelines handed down by the Sentencing

Council. Companies with turnovers in excess of £50 million could face fines of up to £10 million on conviction, and possibly more. Furthermore, if a director or employee knows rules are being breached, risking death or disability, then the individual concerned could face up to two years in prison. Nor must an accident have occurred: all the court needs to consider is whether there was an exposure to risk.

So how can workshop operators ensure that their staff stay safe and the law isn't broken? Well, simply writing a health and safety policy and pinning it to the notice board is nowhere near enough, says Stan Rudowski, group head of health, safety and technical services at national tyre, MOT and servicing chain ATS Euromaster. “You will find it's the cleanest document in the workshop, because nobody ever refers to it,” he observes.

Instead, health and safety must be taken directly to the shopfloor. That





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Stan Rudowski

means ensuring that all workers are trained in safe working practices from day one, and alerted to potential hazards where they actually work, he advises. And the approach must also be realistic: illustrating the importance of safe manual handling using an empty box is not acceptable. "Instead, get them to pick up something meaningful to them," he suggests, citing, for example, a van battery.

But it also means ensuring that workshop managers buy in to the health and safety culture. "We're putting all 340 of our centre managers through a three-day course with a one-day practical... We should have completed the exercise by the end of 2017," says Rudowski. And he adds that a programme of refresher courses is being implemented, too.

Having undergone this training, he urges managers to ensure that they watch out for hazards during opening hours - not when workshops are quiet. "That way you will be able to spot if somebody is, say, using an axle stand incorrectly," he explains.

Incidentally, even ATS Euromaster's top executives have attended health and safety training. "In their case, it's more about legislation and setting

standards," he says. But that, in turn, has led to improved safety equipment and safe processes.

Aware, for example, of the devastation that can result from a tyre explosion, ATS Euromaster has developed its own safety cage, with 150 constructed so far. Rudowski observes that there's no British Standard for these cages, explaining that they amount to large steel boxes with corrugated sides. Technicians place the tyre inside and shut the door prior to inflation.

#### **CAPPING CASUALTIES**

"There is no roof, so if there is an explosion, the blast is funnelled upwards." The safety cages cost £3,000-£4,000, compared with £400-£600 workshops usually expect to pay. But a fatality or severe injury would cost far more. "So far as truck tyre fitting is concerned we've also been moving away from hammers and tyre levers, and switching to tyre fitting machines," he adds. Welding hammers and levers is always potentially hazardous.

Meanwhile, using a third party to assess and certify safe working practices makes sense. That was the route taken by Paul Clark Services (PCS), which is

now accredited to the occupational health and safety standard OHSAS 18001, through Alcumus ISOQAR.

"We provide engineering support to the bus and coach industry and we have our own workshop adjacent to our Royal Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire, offices," says service delivery manager Mike Britten. "We use it to maintain our fleet of 40 vans and for other tasks, including special engineering projects for the bus industry. We may also decide to go for IRTE Workshop Accreditation."

Specifically though, with an eye to avoiding trip hazards, PCS has opted for cable-free mobile column lifts and installed low-level lighting as well as roof lights. Why? Because inadequate lighting is among chief causes of accidents in workshops: people do not see the danger until it is too late.

In the same vein, chuck guards are fitted to drills; presses have gates; pedestrian walkways are properly marked; and safety barriers are provided wherever risk assessments reveal they are necessary. "What we're talking about here is best practice," insists Britten. And those are the kinds of practices all workshop owners and managers should adopt. **TE**