



SAFETY FIRST

Robust health and safety measures are required of commercial vehicle workshops - as they are of all workplace environments.

Steve Banner explains

Hefty financial penalties await workshops that break health and safety rules, as Volvo can testify. Last year it was fined £900,000 after a technician at one of the dealerships it owns was severely injured in a fall from a ladder. He struck his head, lost consciousness and was placed in a medically-induced coma for a fortnight.

The technician was still suffering from ongoing complications and unable to return to work more than 12 months after the incident at Volvo Truck and Bus Centre in Enfield, north London. Volvo pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and was ordered to pay costs of almost £6,000 as well as the fine.

An investigation by the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) revealed that the ladder did not belong to the dealership, was damaged and its anti-slip feet were worn. It had not been maintained or checked to ensure that it was suitable for use, and at the time of the fall Volvo had not trained its staff to select, inspect and use equipment for working at height. "This worker suffered life-changing injuries that could have been prevented by simple health and safety precautions," commented HSE inspector Nick Wright.

Workshop managers need to know that fines for breaching health and safety rules are becoming heavier, thanks to new guidelines introduced by the Sentencing Council on 1 February

2016. Major companies with turnovers in excess of £50 million can now face fines of up to £10 million on conviction.

In addition, if a director or employee knows that there is a breach of the rules that may cause death or disability and does nothing about it, then the individual concerned could face a jail sentence of up to two years. Nor does an accident have to have happened; all the court needs to look at is whether there was an exposure to risk.

CLAMP DOWN

"More people have been sent to prison in the last 12 months for breaking the rules than in the previous 20 years," reckons Stuart Allen, director and

principal safety consultant at Rawlings Safety and Training Consultancy Services. His company now partners with the RHA (Road Haulage Association), and he advises workshop operators to take providing safe, risk-assessed, working environments more seriously.

That thought is echoed by Paul Fisher, group safety, health and environmental manager at Scania. "You need to treat the 1974 Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 as your bible," he warns. "Nor should you neglect the other regulations that apply, including LOLER [Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998], PUWER [Provision and Use of Work Equipment



Regulations 1998] and COSHH [Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002]."

Creating and maintaining a safe workshop involves everything from good housekeeping - ensuring that tools are not left lying around (trip hazard) and clearing up spillages of oil (slip hazard) - to measures such as covering or cordoning off pits when they are not in use. It also means checking that all equipment is fit for use, regularly maintained and periodically tested, if that is what the rules require.

"As far as ladders are concerned, we only use our own - they are checked prior to use and are thoroughly inspected every six months," advises Ali Chambers, who is responsible for health and safety at Carrier Transicold Eastern. "And anybody who needs to work at height has to wear a fall restraint harness."

"When it comes to working at height we use steps but we use working platforms and over-cab gantries, too," says David Pointon, health, safety, environmental and security manager at Ryder, which operates 25 workshops nationwide. It all depends on which is the safest and most practical way of accessing a particular area, he explains.

Safety also means arranging for new employees to be properly inducted, says Allen. A competent person needs to explain the firm's procedures - which may be different from those where the individual worked before - and how all the equipment works.

Furthermore, the new recruit must sign a document that shows they have been through the induction process, he continues. Remember that if an incident occurs with a pedestal drill, for



example, one of the first questions to be asked will be whether the worker was shown how to use it - and whether the workshop can prove that this was the case.

FRONT OF MIND

On that note, reinforcing the safety message at every opportunity is vitally important, according to Helen Moore, compliance and HR manager at Scania dealership TruckEast. "We have regular toolbox talks covering topics such as fire safety, working at height and inspection pits," she says. "And nobody is allowed to get away with saying 'Helen does the health and safety'. Health and safety is everybody's job."

Incidentally, if safety is to be given the priority it deserves, then buy-in from

management is also essential, insists Allen. The penalties outlined earlier should help concentrate minds.

But, while workshop safety matters, do not neglect the yard, advises Pointon. "Vehicles and pedestrians must be clearly separated and an entry control system installed to prevent people from driving or walking in," he says. Fail to do so and there's a risk that someone will be run over.

Additionally, where third party technicians are required to attend a workshop - to, say, repair a temperature-controlled truck's refrigeration system - management are obliged to ensure they work safely. Why? Because they may be prosecuted if they fail to do so and there is an accident. One bus company was recently fined £600,000 after a contractor suffered a fatal fall at its premises. [TE](#)