

## Crane collapse strengthens calls for action

*The collapse of a tower crane in Croydon in June has added strength to calls for stronger laws and enforcement by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).*

The crane in Croydon, one of two based on the Haymills site, had been there for eight months and was having six sections inserted into the mast when the incident happened. The complete top of a modern Terex Comedil crane, belonging to Laing O'Rourke's plant arm Select Plant, fell onto the neighbouring Croydon Park Hotel. The crane operator suffered broken ribs, collarbone and shoulder, and a rigging team were stranded halfway up the tower, taking seven hours to rescue them.

The HSE served a notice on Select Plant Hire, the Kent-based owners of the tower crane, banning them from erecting cranes without properly trained staff.

Comparisons have been made between the Croydon crash and one in Canary Wharf in May 2000 when three workers were killed. The HSE investigation uncovered a number of serious underlying causes for the Canary Wharf disaster including poor site working practices, long hours being worked, and inadequate instruction and training for the workers.

Over the last year there have now been four major incidents involving tower cranes. In September 2006 a Falcon crane collapsed in Battersea killing its driver, Jonathan Cloke, and Michael Alexa, a member of the public. In October 2006 there was a non-fatal incident on a Sir Robert McAlpine's site in Holborn, London. In January 2007 another Falcon crane collapsed in Liverpool killing Polish site worker Zbigniew Swirzynski and trapping the driver.



PIC: THE HAZARDS CAMPAIGN

### Crane safety group award

Battersea Crane Disaster Action Group (BCDAG) received an award for their campaign activities following the loss of the lives of Jonathan Cloke and Michael Alexa in the crane collapse on 26th September 2006. BCDAG have involved the local community, local unions, campaign groups, councillors and MPs in their campaign for safer cranes and construction sites.

Pictured are Angela Bedy, Michael's partner, and Liliana Alexa, Michael's mother, receiving the award from Eve Barker on behalf of the Hazards Campaign. The 'Alan' award was given in the name of much missed campaigner Alan Dalton at this year's Hazards Conference in Manchester in July. Campaigner Eve Barker was Alan's partner.

#### More information:

▲ <http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/docs/allannominationform2007.pdf>

Previous reports in *The Daily Hazard*:

▲ <http://www.lhc.org.uk/members/pubs/newslet/91dha.htm>

Following the Liverpool incident, Falcon Cranes was issued a prohibition notice by the HSE which required inspection of all their cranes. This found 10% of their cranes had serious safety problems, known as category A faults, that had to be addressed before they could be used again.

Another area of concern is the way HSE responds to reports of unsafe findings when machinery and large plant is inspected. The owners of machinery and plant are required to have it inspected

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# Massive increase in work deaths

*Figures released by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for 2006/7 show there was an 11% rise in the number killed at work, with a 28% increase in construction alone. In total 241 workers died, up from 217 deaths in 2005/06 with 77 construction workers killed, up from 60 the previous year. The service sector also saw a rise from 73 to 85 worker fatalities, an increase of 16%.*

There are no signs the government or HSE are to reverse their 'lighter touch' policy and accept calls for increased enforcement activity by HSE. Health and Safety Commissioner John Spanswick of Bovis Lend Lease said: "It is wrong to think that if we double the number of inspectors it will stop this." He added:

"The ownership being placed more heavily on the industry is more important than the number of safety inspectors on site."

This flies in the face of recommendations previously made by a government select committee that said stronger enforcement was key to reducing workplace health and safety problems.

These recommendations have been consistently ignored by this government with their cuts and pro-business agenda.

Alan Ritchie, General Secretary of construction union UCATT, said: "It is not rocket science to realise that if you implement a rigorous inspection and enforcement regime, sites will become safer and bosses will be forced to accept their safety responsibilities. If you sit back and do little or nothing deaths will increase."

Peter Hain the Secretary of State at the Department of Work and Pensions and in charge of health and safety is calling another construction safety summit in September.

## Rise in workplace fatalities 'linked to HSE cuts'

Prospect, the union representing HSE inspectors, policy advisers, scientists and managers said the 2006–07 statistics for work-related deaths confirm that HSE's reaction to its shrinking budget and reduced workforce has been to cut the amount of investigation and enforcement. They also said this is despite evidence showing that inspection backed by enforcement is the most effective way of ensuring employers comply with their

health and safety responsibilities.

Mike Macdonald of Prospect said: "Unless HSE is properly funded it cannot function. It cannot meet its public expectations to advise, inspect and enforce workplace health and safety so that Britain's 28 million workers have confidence they will not be injured or killed at work. Over 350 major injuries were not investigated last year due to the lack of trained inspectors."

## Flawed manslaughter law passed

The government has finally passed its Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act. The new law has been roundly criticised for only allowing companies to be fined if found guilty of manslaughter. It avoids the key issue of individual responsibility at the highest level within businesses, directors and senior managers who make decisions on how the business is to be run, and does not allow for imprisonment if found guilty.

Apart from a fine on a company there are two further possible penalties – a remedy order (in which the court orders particular improvements to be made) and a publicity order (in which the court requires the convicted organisation to publicise details of the conviction).

Alan Ritchie, General Secretary of construction union UCATT said: "This is a hollow victory. The legislation falls far short of Labour party policy which committed the party to campaign for director's duties and the possibility of imprisonment for negligent directors."

Further information from the Ministry of Justice: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/newsrelease260707b.htm>

## Recent fatal incidents

**Stephen Griffiths**, 44, from Poplar, died on the 6th August when he fell on a Sir Robert McAlpine site in Upper Thames St in the City.

**John Walker**, 33, from Dunstable, died on the 1st August when he was crushed on a Multiplex site at the Elephant and Castle. He was employed by 777 Demolition.

**Kolawole Ojo Babadiya**, 28, known as Kola, was shot while working as door security as he was trying to protect a woman outside a bar in Wandsworth in July.

**Tan Li**, 18, from Enfield, drowned in Southgate swimming pool on 3rd July. Southgate Leisure Centre swimming pool is run for Enfield council by private sector company Enfield Leisure Centres Ltd.



*Patrick O'Sullivan's family at Wembley stadium.*

## Wembley memorial

The London Hazards Centre has been helping the family of a man killed on the construction of Wembley National Stadium in discussions for a memorial to him on the site. Patrick O'Sullivan, 54, died at the site on the 15th January 2004 when he was hit by falling scaffold.

With completion of the construction, the site has been handed over to Wembley National Stadium Ltd who now run it from day to day. Stadium representatives met with Mary, Patrick's wife, and their children Margaret and John and were helpful in discussions which should reach an agreement on a memorial.

## Safety screens dispute

Tower Hamlets Council's decision to remove screens that would protect staff in their new housing office has been questioned by local Unison members concerned about staff safety.

Tower Hamlets Unison held protests against the moves and said: "Whilst we welcome the bright and friendly reception area in a more accessible location for local people, we are concerned about the lack of safety screens. An independent Health and Safety report confirmed both UNISON and GMB's fears that the low, unscreened reception desks represent a real safety risk."

The new office for council housing applicants and tenants has been designed and built so there is minimum contact with housing staff by the public through see-through safety screens. The initial contact points are all unscreened. Some of the interview rooms have screens but not all of them.

Unison are concerned because of previous experiences in other offices where members of the public have had close contact with staff which have led to situations where they and the public may have been at risk.

The London Hazards Centre was

asked by Unison to inspect the new workplace and give their opinion.

Centre worker Mick Holder said: "While the Council had gone some way to reduce the risk of assault there were still areas of concern, such as the number of staff available to take control in a difficult situation, free standing furniture that could be used as a weapon and why the screens had to be removed in the first place. I am not a fan of the fashion for removing screened environments as I do not believe it is the screens that make the clients angry." Mick also pointed to the continuing dispute about removed screens in the Benefits Agency who have seen an increase in reported incidents since the screens were removed.

# Occupational cancer protest



*Campaigners from all over the country came to lobby a meeting discussing the government's occupational cancer priorities held by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in London. They raised concerns about the UK's persistent under-estimation of the true extent of the occupational link to cancers. The HSE's position has been that just 4% of all cancers are occupationally related but academics have been saying for many years that this was a gross under-estimation, with the real figure 12% or more.*

A recent report, "Burying the evidence – How the UK is prolonging the occupational cancer epidemic" (see *Hazards* link below) says that this under-estimation allows the HSE a weaker approach to the issue than they should really have.

The report says: "HSE's approach includes neither a requirement nor a strategy for the reduction in the

number and volumes of cancer-causing substances, processes and environments at work. Its recommendations for action range from complacent to non-existent. The result is that the UK faces at least 20,000 and possibly in excess of 40,000 new cases of work-related cancer every year, leading to thousands of deaths and an annual cost to the economy of between £29.5bn and £59bn. Preventing just 100 of these cancer deaths would more than offset the entire Health and Safety Executive annual budget."

The report also says the HSE underestimates the occupational links to cancers suffered by women.

#### **For further information on occupational cancer:**

*Hazards* magazine:

▲ <http://www.hazards.org/cancer/index.htm>

The European trade union safety thinktank HESA:

▲ [http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/dossiers/dossier.asp?dos\\_pk=20](http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/dossiers/dossier.asp?dos_pk=20)

## Memorial to asbestos legacy

Members of Barking and Dagenham Asbestos Victims Support Group (BAD Asbestos) have achieved initial agreement with councillors for a permanent memorial at the former site of the Cape Asbestos Factory. The issue now has to be taken to a full council Assembly for a final decision.

Cape made asbestos products at the factory in Harts Lane, Barking between 1913 and 1968. Hundreds of people are thought to have died from working in, or living in the vicinity of the factory. More will have died from working as end users

of the asbestos products. Sadly there are likely to be more.

BAD Asbestos presented a petition to the Council calling for a memorial in April. Mick Connolly of BAD Asbestos said: "The meeting decision was a big and important step. There was recognition of this as a good idea."

#### **For more information on the Cape factory and the issue of asbestos:**

▲ <http://www.badasbestos.org.uk/index.htm>

# Asbestos compensation battle in the Lords



PICT: LHC

*Members of the union GMB, who represented many asbestos ladders, were joined by members of the T&GWU, Amicus and UCATT in parliament.*

Campaigners lobbied the House of Lords in the hope that they would reverse a decision made in the Court of Appeal blocking compensation for sufferers of pleural plaques, a non fatal asbestos condition. They are viewed, campaigners say wrongly, as an injury without symptoms and this has led to the possibility of compensation that has been awarded for 20 years being blocked. The case has been appealed to the House of Lords who are expected to give their decision in October.

Pleural plaques are a condition that may not produce immediate symptoms, although many sufferers say they can be painful and can restrict lung function. They are also an indicator of asbestos exposure and the potential for more serious illness later. It is the most common asbestos related condition.

## New asbestos support group set up

East London Mesothelioma Support (ELMS) has been set up by Eileen Beadle (pictured) whose husband Raymond died from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma last year. Eileen plans to help those suffering the cancer, or their families, with practical and emotional support through a free advice line and web site.

**Freephone advice line 5-10 pm  
0800 8766 772  
[www.elms-group.co.uk](http://www.elms-group.co.uk)**

## Success for asbestos cancer drug campaign

The government's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has changed its mind about allowing mesothelioma sufferers a new drug, Alimta (pemetrexed disodium).

Mesothelioma is an incurable cancer caused by asbestos exposure and Alimta can help extend and improve the quality of patients lives.

Initially NICE wanted to limit the drug's use but campaigners lobbied hard resulting in this change of heart. If there are no further objections, the drug should be readily available throughout the NHS in the next few months.



PICT: LHC

*Eileen Beadle of ELMS.*

### NOTICE OF AGM

The London Hazards Centre's AGM will be:  
**Wednesday 21st November 2007 6pm**

**Hampstead Town Hall Centre  
213 Haverstock Hill London NW3 4QP**

The AGM is a public meeting for LHC members and supporters.

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and if any major faults are found then HSE have to be informed, known as an adverse insurance report.

The system for dealing with adverse insurance reports was changed three years ago as HSE tried to focus diminishing resources on 'priority topics'.

Machinery safety was not a 'priority topic', and still is not. After such a report an inspection visit by an inspector used to be highly likely but since the change visits have become highly unlikely.

In recent years the boom in construction has seen small family firms becoming big operators and huge numbers of relatively unskilled workers taking on safety critical work. Campaigners have questioned whether the change in HSE procedures, which downplayed the importance of machinery and crane safety, led to or contributed to the increase in serious crane incidents.

Liliana Alexa of the Battersea Crane Disaster Action Group (BCDAG) and mother

of Michael, has been busy drawing people's attention to the issue of crane safety. Outside the Croydon site Liliana said: "I was very angry when I heard another crane had collapsed in Croydon. Why is this happening? Even after my son's death another crane collapsed in Liverpool, killing someone. The emphasis seems to be on launching investigations after accidents and not enough is being done to prevent these accidents from happening in the first place."

These comments reflect the campaign aims of BCDAG who want more HSE inspectors out in the field and for them to have a more vigorous enforcement policy. BCDAG are also calling for stronger laws covering cranes.

They are likely to get their chance as they have been invited to attend an event organized by the Strategic Forum for Construction (SFFC), a cross industry/government body who will be discussing what can be done to prevent similar incidents in the future.

### Stress Network Conference

*Enforcing the HSE Stress Management Standards*

Saturday November 10th 2007  
Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Birmingham  
<http://www.workstress.net/>

## London Hazards Advice Line

Free advice and support for Londoners on health and safety at work and in the community. We aim especially to work with local groups such as tenants/residents organisations, black and minority ethnic networks, union branches, etc. We'll provide the level of support you need, from a single phone call to long-term support for a local campaign.

**020 7794 5999 Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri, 10–12 and 2–5**

USING THE  
CENTRE

## Health and safety training

The London Hazards Centre (LHC) provides training on workplace health and safety which is suitable for managers and employees alike. The training is participative and will cover the problems encountered at the workplace, what to do to ensure controls are in place and that the law is complied with.

Our training is provided in two ways, either by running courses as a consultant or alternatively by people attending our in-house courses held in Islington.

### TRAINING CONSULTANCY

We will train up to 16 people per day for £550.00. We provide the trainer and course which is delivered at a venue organised by our client.

### IN-HOUSE TRAINING COURSES

Courses cost £65.00 per person and are held at the Red Cross building near the Angel, Islington which is fully accessible.

Our current programme includes:

- ▲ **Introduction to Workplace Health and Safety**  
Thursday 25th October 2007
- ▲ **Introduction to Risk Assessment**  
Tuesday 30th October 2007
- ▲ **Introduction to Workplace Health and Safety**  
Thursday 1st November 2007
- ▲ **Introduction to Risk Assessment**  
Tuesday 6th November 2007

Our training is activity based and the timetable is from 10am to 4pm.

Should you wish more information or to discuss any of the above or other training courses we may be able to provide please call LHC on 020 7794 5999.