MPs Tackle Working at Height Dangers

The All-Party Parliamentary Group examined working at height dangers, publishing a report that calls for industrywide changes.

Earlier this week the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) published Staying Alive: Preventing Serious Injury and Fatalities while Working at Height, which was a result of a yearlong inquiry that carefully examined working at height culture.

Since the introduction of the Work at Height Regulations 2005, the UK has had some of the lowest workplace fatality and serious injury rates in the European Union. However, data from the Health and Safety Executive found that 18% of those who died at work did so as a result of a fall from height. For those who experience non-fatal accidents, a fall had the potential of leading to life-changing injuries.

The APPG wanted to understand why workers fall from height, leading to death and serious injury, and aimed to develop a set of recommendations to reduce the number of falls.

The group made four recommendations:

1. The introduction of enhanced reporting without an additional burden, through RIDDOR, which at a minimum, records the scale of a fall, the method used and the circumstances of the fall.
2. The appointment of an independent body that allows confidential, enhanced and digital reporting of all near misses and accidents that do not qualify for RIDDOR reporting. The data collected by this independent body will be shared with government and industry to inform health and safety policy.
3. The extension of the Working Well Together – Working Well at Height safety campaigns.
4. An equivalent system to Scotland’s Fatal Accident Inquiry process to be extended to the rest of the UK.

In addition to these points, the APPG has called for further consultation and a review of work at height culture which includes an investigation into the suitability of legally binding financial penalties in health and safety.

Ralli Director James Reilly argues “Prevention is always better than a cure. Therefore any regulatory regime that can promote safety using data and campaigns is laudable, particularly if it can be incorporated into exiting systems so as to not be an excessive burden on industry. However the devastating effect of falls and the life changing injuries they cause can never be entirely reduced.”

He continued: “Whilst the parliamentary group are looking into the suitability of legally binding

financial penalties in health and safety they should also address the steady erosion of access to justice caused in the wake of the Enterprise Act. It is of little benefit to the individual or family to learn that a Company have retrospectively been fined with a penalty going to the state, whilst they live with everyday the life changing consequences. Before the introduction of the Enterprise Act 2013 there was civil liability automatically attached to a breach of the management of health and safety at work regulations 1999. Essentially this meant a worker did not have to prove negligence for faulty work equipment or breaches of work at height regulations. Effectively giving the regulations real teeth for the citizen. A right that is or cannot be enforced is not a right."

"The Government introduced the Enterprise Act on the political whim of the now heavily discredited David Cameron who had demonstrated a customary superficial understanding of health and safety on taking office when he commissioned the Common Sense – Common safety review by Lord Young. One aspect present day parliamentarians could do is look at whether this has caused a deterioration in standards," James Reilly concluded.