

NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

DATE: Wednesday 9 September 2020

TIME: 14:00 - 15:00

METHOD: Zoom Meeting

CHAIR: Chris Stephens MP, Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary on Working at Height

MINUTES

1. Introduction

Vice-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary on Working at Height, Chris Stephens MP welcomed attendees to the second virtual meeting of the APPG. Chris explained that the Chair, Alison Thewliss MP offered her apologies as she had to attend a last-minute debate in the House of Commons in her role as SNP Shadow Treasury Spokesperson.

Chris stated that falls from height account for the highest number of preventable fatalities and injuries across all sectors in the UK, and that there is a common assumption that falls from height exclusively occur in the construction sector. However, he noted that agriculture, forestry and fishing have the highest rate of workplace deaths across the UK and falls from height account for 15% of the total number of workplace deaths in these sectors over the past five years.

As the APPG on Working at Height seeks to understand the root causes and propose effective, sensible measures to send people safely home from work in all sectors, Chris highlighted that the meeting will focus on rural locations and why working at height serious injuries and fatalities occur. He added that in doing so, the meeting will look to break down the myths around falls from height and consider how working at height sectors can better work together to reduce serious injuries and fatalities across the board.

2. Tom Price, Farm Transport and Safety Policy Adviser, National Farmers' Union

Chris Stephens introduced the first of four speakers **Tom Price** from the **National Farmers' Union**.

Tom Price said that there were 8 fatalities for every 100,000 people working in agriculture. He said that this showed that falls from height in the industry are significant. He noted that it was not the biggest cause of fatalities in agriculture but accounted for 19% of fatal injuries, which should be taken seriously. He added that there is likely to be underreported documentation of incidents.

He stated that agriculture is different to other industries where farm workplaces are often adjacent to farm homes and so vulnerable and older people have more access to workspaces. He noted that this was important to consider as there is a culture in farming where many farmers work beyond retirement age which is a health and safety risk. He

added that farmers have a 'can do' attitude which can lead them to dismiss taking precautions when working at height in rural locations.

Tom said that the NFU has identified working at height as a key safety issue and said the important message for farmers was to avoid roof work and do as much work as possible on the ground. If this cannot be the case, he advised farmers to issue contractors who have the right skills and knowledge to work on roofs in a safe manner. He said that the NFU produce written guidance, use social media, and provide materials on their website to promote the central message that safety comes first when working at height in agricultural locations.

3. Steve Leniec, Chair of the National Agricultural Group, Unite the Union

Chris Stephens MP then invited **Steve Leniec** from **Unite the Union** to speak. Steve said that Unite the Union has a large presence in the agricultural sector and that as a union, it recognises that health and safety is a key issue for their members. He highlighted that the **National Agricultural Group of Unite** disseminates information to its members when there are changes to health and safety regulations.

He stated that members of the National Agricultural Group take an active role in health and safety, sitting on the NFU's Farm Safety Partnership board and playing a key role in developing policy with respect to agriculture. He argued that the agriculture sector has a poor record when it comes to health and safety and has stubbornly maintained this record.

Steve said that there are a number of different scenarios where fatalities from working at height in rural locations occur. He stated that there is a need for increased maintenance in workplaces located rurally. He added that working at height fatalities do not only occur from roofs but haystacks too.

He noted that if work is to be undertaken on a farm it should be conducted with the correct equipment and a full risk assessment should be completed. He added that there needs to be a culture change in farmers having a 'can do' attitude to health and safety. He concluded that Unite wanted to see more emphasis on risk assessments on working at height on farms and better training available for farmers.

4. Tina Morgan, Chair of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health Rural Industries Group

Chris Stephens MP then introduced the third speaker, **Tina Morgan**. Tina outlined that the **Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Rural Industries Group** have over 1,500 members and noted that working at height in rural locations was a topic of interest. She echoed Tom and Steve's points about the scale and size of the problem. She said the issue that the Rural Industries Group has found in relation to fatalities in rural locations was that work at height has not been adequately planned.

In line with Tom and Steve, Tina noted that in the rural and agricultural sectors there is a 'can do' attitude with work being done without much thinking and planning ahead. She said this may also be due to people being concerned about the costs of contracting

professionals to carry out work and that cuts to subsidies and grants often lead to people undertaking dangerous work themselves.

She stated that access to equipment when working at height in rural locations is also a problem. She noted that equipment can also be easily hired without needing to demonstrate any competence in using it. She also highlighted the negative imagery of farmers undertaking dangerous work on TV, social media, and print as contributing to the overall reluctance in adhering to health and safety measures in rural locations.

Tina highlighted that ensuring a consistent message across all groups who represent workers in rural locations was important. She also called for an increased presence of the Health and Safety Executive in places of work in rural locations and to include compulsory education and safety training for those failing to adhere to health and safety measures.

5. Mike Pryke, Rural and Industrial Design and Building Association (RIDBA) representative on Advisory Committee for Roof Safety

Chris Stephens MP then introduced the final speaker, **Mike Pryke** from the **Rural and Industrial Design and Building Association**. Mike stated that in his role he regularly attends sites in rural environments and finds difficulties with people working in rural locations. He said that farm buildings tend to be in desperate need of maintenance and repair and were often constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. He highlighted the key role education has to play in ensuring health and safety in rural environments. He noted that people do not have access to safety training due to high costs and do not understand the dangers that come with working at height.

He stated that in previous years he had a positive relationship with the Health and Safety Executive but currently noted their reduced presence in workplaces in rural locations. He said that there was a need for the Health and Safety Executive to be more present in rural locations and that more inspectors should be visiting sites, stopping dangerous work from taking place and making sure people are working safely. Following the contributions from the four expert speakers, Chris Stephens MP then opened the floor to questions.

6. Question and Answer Session

Peter Bennett, Managing Director at PASMA noted that there had been lots of fatalities in the construction sector for over-50s and wondered whether this was mirrored in the agriculture sector.

Steve Leniec said that this was often the case in the agriculture sector as it has an ageing workforce. He noted that the reporting of fatal accidents by the HSE is not detailed and that there needs to be more information provided to understand further what occurs during a fatality.

Adele Masztalerz, Environmental Health Practitioners at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health stated that in rural sites the what3words app was very useful for lone workers working in dangerous circumstances.

Claire Rizos, Director at Clarity Safety Solutions said that she deals with people who work in fisheries and fish farms and noted that the people she meets have no understanding of health and safety and often work without any external influence.

Tina Morgan commended the what3wordsapp and encouraged those working in rural locations to use the app. She also said that there was a need for more Safety and Health Awareness Days (SHADs) to promote training, and a need for more compliance events for those working in agriculture.

Stephanie Berkeley, Manager at the Farm Safety Foundation said that she has been delivering training sessions to around 30-40 land based colleges a year to deliver important messages around health and safety in rural locations, which she said was crucial as people working in agriculture may not have the literacy levels to keep up to date with written guidance.

Scott Craig, Head of Coaching and Operations at Aerial Edge highlighted that health and safety for working at height in rural locations requires a culture change in human behaviour and that there cannot just be a shift to legislate workers into compliance. He also said that there should be a focus in providing safe equipment to workers.

Alan Plom, Health and Safety Specialist at the Institution of Agricultural Engineers noted that the wide-ranging attendance of the meeting was encouraging and highlighted the positive opportunity there was in spreading a united message for increased health and safety measures for those working in rural locations.

Andy Sloss, Health and Safety Advisor at Forestry and Land Scotland highlighted the important role that drones play and will continue to play in ensuring and monitoring health and safety in rural locations.

Chris Stephens drew the question and answer session and the meeting to a close. He thanked the speakers and attendees for their contributions and reminded attendees to keep in touch on the important issues discussed.