

Summary of the APPG on Working at Height meeting

12 December 2023, Palace of Westminster



Working at Height

The Work at Height industry joined forces in parliament on 12 December 2023 for the APPG on Working at Height to discuss how industry can reduce the physical, mental, and financial burdens of working at height and cement the UK's position as a world-leader in worker safety.

The discussion was opened by Alison Thewliss MP, Chair of the APPG, who welcomed first-time attendees to Parliament, thanked those in attendance and set out the agenda and speakers for the event. Alison offered her apologies that she would not be able to attend the full meeting due to the debate in Chamber taking place at the same time, at which her attendance was required.

PANEL 1: RIDDOR Update on falls from height and fatalities

Stephen Green, HM Inspector of Health and Safety, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) opened the discussion talking about the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) and gave an update on the current fall from height statistics. He spoke about the 40 falls from height that resulted in deaths in Great Britain in 2022/23. He noted that while the number of fatal workplace falls from height has decreased over the longer-term, the last 10 years' figures have remained broadly consistent and noted there was still more work to do to ensure these figures decrease.

Stephen highlighted a lack of planning as a key cause of work at height incidents before handing back to Alison who reiterated the importance of industry engaging with their MPs on this important issue.

Sarah Bachelor, the Farm Safety & Transport Advisor from the National Farmers Union (NFU) introduced the NFU, who represent 46,000 farms and growers across England and Wales.

'The need for health and safety' stemmed from Sarah's own personal experiences from growing up on a farm and her father's near miss when working at height. She referred to farm working as a 'lifestyle' and noted that farmers tend to carry out a variety of roles on the farm due to resource constraints.

'Agriculture represents 1% of the workforce in the UK, yet the fatality rate is 21x higher than the all-industry rate, however the 5-year average has decreased from 32 to 26 and we are hopeful for more positive change.'

In 2022/23, working at height was the second biggest cause of fatalities on farms, accounting for 4 out of 27 deaths. Sarah also highlighted the three deaths that have occurred so far within the recording year. She highlighted the campaigns, such as those for Young Farmers, that the NFU runs to encourage safer working. The NFU advocate training to professionalise the workplace and urges training providers to work closely with the young farmers.

The NFU leads the Farm Safety Partnership, a collaboration of organisations with a responsibility to show industry leadership by promoting safe systems of work within all sectors of agriculture. Sarah noted that they are also targeting the older generation as well as young farmers, to ensure all ages have the information they need to stay safe at height.

'As part of the Farm Safety Week this year, run by the Yellow Wellies, the NFU launched their 'Take 5 to Stay Alive' campaign, encouraging everyone working on a farm or in an agricultural setting to take a 5 minute pause before starting each task to review it, assess the safety requirements and put in place those small, cost effective, life-saving actions which can prevent accidents.'

Sarah finished with a positive message; that there is a genuine desire for change and improvement in the sector which will hopefully result in a reduction in the accident figures she mentioned earlier.

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Luke Collins, National Safety Officer for Unite the Union, introduced the work of the Union to support workers across all sectors, which includes them sharing information with their 1 million+ members via their national and regional reps, and working closely with the HSE and trade associations. Luke spoke about a steel worker in Wales who suffered life-changing injuries as a result of a fall from height, recognizing that there is still work to be done cross-sector to reduce these incidents. Luke ended his session by reiterating Unite's support for the APPG and encouraged those in attendance to get in touch with Unite for any workplace support they may need.

Hannah Williams, Charity Manager from the No Falls Foundation, spoke about a real example to highlight the people behind the statistics. She talked about one family who were torn apart by a fatal fall from height, the emotional, personal, and financial implications, and the fact that investigations into the accident are still ongoing, 4 years later. Hannah referenced other known fall from height survivors who suffer life-long consequences and are unable to return to work, as well as the financial burden on the UK government to support those in need.

The No Falls Foundation fully supports the APPG's call for simplified reporting, and for data on how and why falls happen to be more easily accessible. Hannah discussed the charity's current research survey and the significant information this will gather.

'The No Falls Foundation is undertaking the largest research survey of its kind into the underlying causes of a fall from height. The survey will be aimed at all sectors and people the either experienced, witnessed or investigated a fall from height. It will allow them to share detailed information on fall from height accidents. It will inform upcoming research projects we are undertaking as well as enabling us and others to focus resources in a more targeted way to prevent falls from height.'

Hannah introduced 'No Falls Week' a powerful cross-sector campaign dedicated to promoting safe working at height, which will take place 13–17 May 2024. The campaign will highlight the mental, emotional, physical, and financial costs to those killed and injured by a fall from height and their families. Freely available resources and tools will help businesses and individuals ensure everyone who works at height comes home safely, and Hannah encouraged everyone to get involved and support the campaign.

Panel 2: How technology can make a difference

Peter Bennett OBE, chair of the Access Industry Forum, thanked Alison for chairing the first panel and introduced the second panel. He restated that 40 people have lost their lives from a fall from height last year in the workplace, while 5,000 people were injured, noting there is substantial underreporting of non-fatal falls from height for all workers

According to a recent study, only 30% of reportable incidences were reported to HSE (this figure is significantly lower for the self-employed with a reporting rate of just 12%). The HSE estimate the scale of non-fatal workplace injury from falls from height over the last 10 years may be up to 425,000 (data from the Labour Force Survey).

992,000 working days were lost from non-fatal falls from height in Great Britain last year. Not only that, the total cost of non-fatal falls in 2022/23 is estimated to be over £770 million. These figures have been consistent over recent years with no signs of improvement.

'Research undertaken by the AIF has found that limited data collected on the circumstances surrounding accidents, coupled with a problematic reporting system, make it difficult to pinpoint the underlying causes of falls from height. The consequences of a fall from height are usually life changing for those involved with many unlikely to return to the previous occupation as well as having long term consequences for employers, colleagues, and families.'

Peter then touched on the 'Staying Alive' report that was commissioned by the APPG in 2019 and which made a variety of recommendations to reduce fatalities and life changing injuries.

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Peter stated that the AIF has renewed its call for a new simplified way of reporting which reflects the cause of workplace actions so preventative measures can be implemented. He noted the two upcoming research studies from the No Falls Foundation as a positive step in gathering better intelligence to support future decision-making.

The use of technology to improve safety of height was praised by Peter, mentioning IPAF (The International Powered Access Federation) ePAL, which will be developed to control who can operate powered access equipment based on their training and competences.

Peter handed over to **Clive Dickin**, CEO of the National Access and Scaffolding Confederation (NASC). The NASC represents scaffolding and access contractors in the UK and has just under 600 members. Clive discussed how the digitalisation of TG20 standards has been pivotal in the reduction of RIDDOR reported injuries over the past 10 years. It has revolutionised the way scaffolding contractors produce day-to-day scaffolding designs and ensure their scaffolding projects are safe and compliant. Clive discussed the importance of design in scaffold to keep workers safe and reduce errors and failures. 8,000 certificates are being issued from the NASC portal monthly.

Clive introduced the capabilities of VR (virtual reality) and how this can improve training and education in a risk-free environment. Attendees were invited to try the technology for themselves in the room after the meeting. The use of a range of mobile apps by NASC members is also enabling improvement across the scaffolding industry.

Tony Seddon, Managing Director of Fall Arrest Safety Equipment Training (FASET) and Company Secretary at Specialist Access Engineering & Maintenance Association (SAEMA) concluded the second panel of the meeting. He discussed how SAEMA have improved training over the last 2 years through the development of online user training. The aim of the training is to teach people 'the basics' of permanent suspended access before they do formal training at height. 3,000 people have now completed this training to date. Training certificates can be accessed by smartphone to make information available to the user and employer. Tony praised the accessibility and availability of digital training, noting the significant benefits that online card checking facilities can bring in quickly and easily checking worker qualifications.

SAEMA also plan to further development their training offering in 2024, with a plan to incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their training courses.

Q&A Discussion

Attendees took part in an open Q&A, hosted by Peter.

Carl Evans, Sunbelt Rentals, was interested to hear how information can be collated across the UK to make it easier to see who has received training. Tony confirmed the SAEMA tech uses the same background API as is used in CSCS Smart Check, so there are opportunities for future collaboration and information sharing.

Stíofán O'Brien, Laing O'Rourke, noted that they have now mandated tracking technology, compatible with IPAF's ePAL, to prevent unauthorised use of powered access on their sites, and which will ensure those using machines are qualified to do so by checking their qualifications against the machine it's being used on. This has proven extremely successful over the last 4 years within the business.

Close

Peter concluded the meeting on behalf of Alison, thanking everyone for attending and their interest in the APPG and invited everyone to stay for festive drinks and networking.

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