



On the Soapbox

Past Chairman Paul Worster speaks from the heart when it comes to the correct use of PPE

The correct use of PPE to prevent health related issues such as occupational deafness, is a pet subject of mine.

The importance of looking after ourselves at work as professional people cannot be overstated.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 was not designed to cripple industry with unnecessary rules and regulations.

It was designed to save us all from injury, from work-related disorders such as sight or hearing impairment, and to make sure that we work in safe environments.

It is of course up to us to cooperate at all times.

In fairness, the Act was also introduced to save the Government money – e.g.

lost tax revenues from people who became unfit for work due to work-related accidents and injuries.

For example, take deafness, from which I suffer.

This is not something particularly great to put up with on a daily basis, nor easily reversible.

And yet the temptation is always there not to bother with PPE – earmuffs are uncomfortable, but, hey, if you stuff in a pair of Sony Walkman buds you can't hear the machine (quite as much).

Decibel ratings are clearly displayed on all machines these days.

If in doubt – use those ear-defenders!!

Likewise, always put safety boots on – even just to pop out into the yard.

I knew a greenkeeper in our area who did just that – popped out of the office to help a colleague hitch on a trailer – and the trailer dropped off its hitch onto this guy's foot.

The trainers he was wearing gave no protection whatsoever and caused six months off work with zero compensation.

Put the eye protection on if there's any risk (I once got a face-full of sawdust splinters from a bowsaw cut and had to have them taken out of my eye under anaesthetic).

I was minded to put pen to paper a few days ago, not as the result of watching a greenkeeper acting with total disregard to his occupational health, but actually as the result of watching a contractor working at my home.

We had arranged to have cavity wall insulation put into our three-bed semi.

The company, who were strongly endorsed by our local council, sent two operatives in a lorry.

They knocked on the door and very politely explained who they were, what they were going to do, gave the property a quick once-over, mainly as a disclaimer for hitting pipes or gas mains etc., jointly signed some paperwork so I could claim my green discount, and then commenced work.

I was very impressed at this stage, as had we perhaps been elderly people, we would have fully understood the process.

I was a lot less impressed when I saw the work in progress.

First of all a hefty electric masonry drill was plugged in to my outside power socket.

This drill, which looked like it weighed a ton, produced vibrations fit to shake the foundations of the house and enough noise to wake the dead.

I was therefore horrified to see the guy, who had been so polite and professional only moments before, shinning up an unsupported ladder with this monster drill slung over his shoulder.

After a spell of ear-splitting noise he emerged at the top in a huge cloud of dust (which by now coated the windows, the lawn and Next Door's Mercedes!) and not wearing

system was going through.

People are still dying from exposure to asbestos dust 40 years previously (incredibly over 3000 people a year) – who knows what the dust from my 1920's house bricks contained, but I bet it wasn't anything good for lungs! Dust should be in your COSHH assessment – always use a throwaway mask.

To cut a long story short – don't be tempted.

If you haven't got the right gear (PPE) don't do the job, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem.

Sounds obvious; but above everything else our health has to be our primary concern.

If our health fails our quality of life fails also and that's permanent – so what's with the temptation to take the short-cuts?

As a footnote, on the feedback form I let the Cavity Wall company know exactly what I thought about their service – excellent paperwork, but unbelievably poor attention to Health & Safety detail.

Funnily enough I've yet to receive a response!

“Mind that greenkeeper” – he may be deaf

any PPE at all – e.g. no dust mask, no anti-vibration gloves, and no ear defenders.

“Well,” I asked – in a polite sort of way when he'd finished, “So, hey, that drill works well – went through the wall like butter – exactly what is the dba output?”

“The what? Oh no-one's ever asked before – it says somewhere – here it is – 105”.

“Right...” I said carefully “...and what about the vibrations, they must be enough to take most of the enamel off your teeth I should think – what's the hand-arm exposure limit?” “Pardon? Oh – I don't know, but we don't use it for long so it's alright”.

I skimmed over the lack of dust mask and the unsupported ladder – (although I'd had to look away when he was dangling over my conservatory roof!)

As for the dust – there's yet another major occupational hazard.

I inhaled some of the dust just watching my cavity-wallers from a safe distance – heaven knows what this guy's respiratory



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