



E033:06 21 March 2006

HSE urges caution over 'retractable type fall arresters'

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is today reminding industry of the dangers of misusing retractable type fall arresters - sometimes referred to as 'inertia blocks' - following the interim findings of a research project commissioned by HSE.

The findings reveal that retractable type fall arresters, used to protect workers against falls from height, are commonly being misused in circumstances they have not been tested for, creating safety hazards and an increased risk of fatality.

David Thomas, Principal Specialist Inspector and HSE's technical lead on fall protection issues, emphasised the need for caution when using this specialist equipment:

"All industry sectors are exposed to the risks presented by falls from height and these findings underline the need for employers and workers to ensure retractable type fall arresters are used in the correct way. They should be used only in the vertical plane with an overhead anchor unless the manufacturer's instructions clearly state otherwise. If this equipment is used in any other way, or combined with other components in a fall arrest system, it may be unsafe and could result in injury or fatality."

The findings also indicate that some manufacturers and suppliers in the UK are failing to provide adequate instructions and information to use the products safely, which is adding to the problem.

Commenting on the testing of the fall arresters, Mr Thomas said:

"The European Standard does not cover retractable type fall arresters being tested for use over edges - which is sometimes how they are used. In a fall over an edge the retractable lanyard may break, the braking system might be overloaded to failure, or the fall might not be arrested in the distance available. There is a test used by some manufacturers - known as the VG11 test - but we have concerns over its intent and adequacy and will be considering this over the next few months, once the research project is completed. If there is any further advice we will issue it immediately."

Notes to editors

1 A retractable type fall arrester is a device with an encased flexible and extendable lanyard that has a self-braking and locking function and an automatic return facility for the lanyard into the casing. The applicable European Standard is BS EN 360: 2002, Personal protective equipment against falls from a height, Retractable type fall arresters. This specifies the requirements for test methods, marking, information supplied by the manufacturer and packaging. The Standard test only considers the devices themselves and not them being part of a system.

2 Further advice on the use of retractable type fall arresters is given in BS 8437:2005, Code of practice for selection, use and maintenance for personal fall protection systems and equipment for use in the workplace. This publication is available from www.bsi-global.com or by calling the BSI Group on 020 8996 9001.

3 All industry sectors are exposed to the risks presented by falls from height although the level of incidence varies considerably. For more information on falls from height visit www.hse.gov.uk/falls/index.htm

4 The interim report findings were presented to the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Directive 89/686/EEC Standing Committee Working Group. The research is part of a project being carried out for the Health and Safety Commission's Falls from Height Priority Programme. It is due to be completed by the end of August 2006.

5 Regulation 9 of the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 requires employers to provide employees with enough information, instruction and training to enable them to use the PPE correctly and keep it in efficient working order and in good repair. The requirement for manufacturers to test and provide information on the safe use, and limits of use, comes from the Personal.

6 Protective Equipment Regulation 2002, which place duties on manufacturers/suppliers of PPE.

7 HSE is represented both on BSI Technical Committee PH/5, Industrial Safety Belts and Harnesses (which

provides the UK input to the work of European Standards Committee, TC160) and CEN/TC160 Working Group 2, Fall Arrest. HSE's Construction Corporate Topic Group provides technical, professional and engineering expertise in health and safety matters to HSE and industry at a national level.

Press enquiries

Denise Lewisohn 020 7717 6918
Out of hours 020 7928 8382

Public enquiries

HSE's InfoLine 0845 3450055
Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG

HSE information and news releases can be accessed on the Internet www.hse.gov.uk/