



PRESS RELEASE

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Sub Contractors – Poor Ground Conditions Can be Deadly

As winter approaches, the British Constructional Steelwork Association (BCSA), Federation of Master Builders, National Federation of Builders and Structural Timber Association (STA), have joined forces to remind the construction industry about the need for safe ground conditions on construction sites.

Andrew Dixon, Head of Policy at the Federation of Master Builders said ‘Ground conditions could be the difference between life and death for construction site workers. We were lucky to have a dry start to Autumn. But these weather conditions did not last and with the rain comes softer ground and danger.

‘Mobile plant such as cranes and mobile elevated work platforms (MEWPs) weigh many tonnes. If ground conditions are poor, they are at risk of sinking which poses a serious risk to life’ he said.

A recent survey of BCSA members’ Health & Safety Managers found that:

- Most main contractors provide safe site handover certificates to sub contractors
- The Temporary Works Coordinator is usually made known and available to sub contractors
- However, the CDM Principal Designer rarely liaises with sub contractors on site conditions
- While main contractors usually provide adequate ground conditions at the start of a project, ground conditions often deteriorate as work progresses and the ground is sometimes not properly remediated and re-tested.

Ms McCann-Bartlett, Director General of the BCSA said ‘It is pleasing to see that main contractors are generally providing their sub contractors with detailed information about ground conditions at the start of a job as required by the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations. However, the regulations also say they must undertake ongoing monitoring of ground conditions and where the ground is disturbed, consolidate and re-test it.’

‘The Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group’s *Good Practice Guide for Ground Conditions for Construction Plant* provides excellent guidance for all those working in the construction sector. The Guide aims to prevent accidents and save lives by ensuring that ground conditions are suitable for heavy lifting equipment used by sub contractors on construction sites,’ said Paul Bogle, Head of Policy and Research, National Federation of Builders.

The *Good Practice Guide for Ground Conditions for Construction Plant* says that main contractors are responsible for:

- Ensuring the appropriate ground bearing test are carried out
- Providing the information on ground bearing pressures to their contractors
- Informing their contractors of all the relevant underground services locations
- Informing their contractors if any changes are made to the ground
- Ensuring that any ground that is disturbed is properly consolidated and tested again

Andrew Carpenter, Chief Executive of the STA, said ‘As an organisation the STA fully endorses the need for wide recognition of site safety principles and welcomes that the sub contractors that use heavy lifting equipment are behind this campaign. Safety on site is, of course, crucial and we welcome this move to remind contractors of their duty of care.’

Top tips for main contractors:

- Appoint a Temporary Works Coordinator to manage the ground works
- Review the selection of plant and equipment to be used is appropriate
- Gather information on the loads and forces imposed on the ground by the plant
- Determine the nature of the task loads and the use of the plant
- Obtain ground information through assessment and testing
- Determine the ground condition can take the loads for the operation
- Communicate effectively in writing to those responsible for setting up and operating the plant

The *Good Practice Guide for Ground Conditions for Construction Plant* can be downloaded from: <http://www.cpa.uk.net/sfpsg/>

Download *geis6 The Selection, Management and Use of Mobile Elevating Work Platforms* from:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/geis6.htm>

Health and Safety Executive Information on the safe use of Mobile Elevating Work Platforms

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/mewp.htm>

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Editor's notes:

Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group aim is to bring about a continuous reduction in the rate of injuries and ill-health caused through the operation and installation of plant in the construction industry. The Group was formed in 2009 and is led and administered by CPA. HSE and CITB are key participants. Industry organisations that contribute include ALLMI, IPAF, NPORS, BCSA, CBH, BuildUK, TWF, UCATT, HBF, CPCS, SAFED, CECA, FPS, CEA and others.

The **British Constructional Steelwork Association** (BCSA) is the national organisation for the steel construction industry. Its Steelwork Contractor Members undertake the design, fabrication and erection of steelwork for all forms of construction in building and civil engineering. Industry Members are those principal companies involved in the direct supply to steelwork contractors of components, materials or products.

The **Federation of Master Builders** (FMB) is the largest trade association in the UK construction industry, and with around 8,500 members, it is the recognised voice of small and medium-sized (SME) construction firms. Established in 1941 to protect the interests of SME building firms, the FMB is independent and non-profit-making, lobbying continuously for members' interests at both national and local levels. The FMB is a source of knowledge, professional advice and support for its members across the UK. The FMB also offers advice and support to the general public on choosing and working with the right builder.

The **National Federation of Builders** represents small to medium-sized (SME) builders, contractors and house builders across England and Wales. Its members range from the sole trader to large, multi-million pound construction companies, with turnover ranging from below £500k to £500m plus.

The **Structural Timber Association** (STA) represents the vast majority of structural timber industry including suppliers, manufacturers, erectors and designers, as well as associate members which include contractors, architects, housebuilders, housing associations and end user clients. Formerly known as the UK Timber Frame Association, the enlarged Association now includes suppliers of integrated hybrid solutions, including SIPS, Glulam and CLT products, as well as traditional timber frame.