

Large increase in construction site deaths in UK

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So far this year a total of 86 workers have been killed whilst employed on building sites—a 20 percent increase on the previous year. A third of all workplace fatalities now occur on building sites. This figure includes the deaths of construction workers and passers-by.

Construction is now the most dangerous field of employment in the UK. Fatalities in mining and factories—previously responsible for the greatest number of deaths—have fallen into third and fourth place behind construction and fishing respectively. This is primarily due to the mass destruction of employment in these industries over the last 20 years.

Other factors are also at work, however. Workplace deaths tend to rise in periods of economic recession due to cost cutting by employers. But the increase in construction deaths takes place in a period of sustained economic growth. Building sites up and down the country are bustling. Such is the acute competition that companies are making all manner of shortcuts in order to reduce costs. This situation is exacerbated by government deregulation of workplace safety, under the guise of “cutting red tape”. In addition, efforts to arbitrarily cut the unemployment rolls has led to many untrained workers being pushed into potentially dangerous scenarios.

The Health and Safety Commission claims to be targeting the large national construction companies, but is concentrating on smaller subcontractors who are identified as the main culprits. These smaller operators are contracted by the large concerns seeking to save expenses on wages, taxes and training. Competition between them is fierce, creating a situation in which workers' lives are recklessly endangered. As to the responsibilities of the larger construction companies, the Health and Safety Commission has only lamely pledged that it would ask them “to stop going for the

lowest quote, which runs the risk of attracting cowboys and increasing accidents.”



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