

Farm Safety Week 2017 Day 3: The rise and falls of farm safety





Brian will be known to many RIG members as a Senior Lantra Awards Instructor and Verifier, or through his involvement in delivering HSE's Safety Health and Awareness Days throughout GB. Brian is playing an important part in developing and establishing the FSP in Wales and is well-placed to do so with his sound technical and practical background as a farmer and as a trainer. We were very pleased to get him onto our committee too.

The theme for the third day of **#FarmSafetyWeek** was 'Falls'. This topic remains high on the list of risks to be managed because farming carries an above-average risk of falling accidents and the risk of falling from heights or being struck by a falling object account for nearly 30% of all farming fatalities.

As Stephanie Berkeley from the Farm Safety Foundation, the charity behind Farm Safety Week said: "Any fall from height can lead to long term injuries and make it difficult to keep on farming. Most accidents of this type happen either because the work is not properly planned, the risks are not recognised, proper precautions are not taken, or the equipment used is either defective, not appropriate, or used incorrectly."

"According to 'Voice of the Farm' research carried out this year, half of all farmers claim to take risks. I am sure many believe it will 'only take a few minutes' and take risks in the hope that simply being very careful will be enough. But as Jack Fisher knows, it rarely is."

Transporting and stacking large bales has, over recent years, resulted in numerous injuries to and deaths of some operators of the machinery or people near the scene of operations. Jack, a young farmer from Norwich and former student at Easton & Otley College, has spoken movingly in a [film](#) about his 54 year old father Peter who was killed on 11th February this year when a stack of four Heston big bales fell on him when he was unstrapping the load of straw on his lorry.

Peter's tragic accident is a reminder to us all that no matter how experienced you are, farming can be very dangerous. As Jack said: "Dad was a very experienced and heavily qualified driver who had been doing this job for many years." Jack - who can barely bring himself to talk about his father in the past tense - added: "Unless you've lost someone close, it's impossible to describe how this feels. Mum, Gene, Ross and I are just taking one day at a time and I think it'll take a while before the trauma of the accident goes."

"We have agreed to share our story to highlight the impact an accident like this can have on the whole family. Friends and family have been so supportive with an attendance of nearly 500 people at his funeral and have helped raised just over £2,600 for the Farm Safety Foundation (via funeral donations) to help them continue to deliver practical training for the next generation of farmers and hopefully change this poor safety record we have in farming. As a family, we have to carry on and hope that someone reading this will stop and think twice before taking a risk. That would be the best legacy for Dad."



Working at Height

In GB, [HSE's guidance on Safe Working at Height](#) is always flagged up but for something different, have a look on the [HSA website](#) for their take and guidance on avoiding falls and falling materials.

In Northern Ireland, HSENI also provide a basic [checklist](#) to help prevent falls from heights. Barclay Bell, President of the Ulster Farmers' Union and The [Farm Safety Partnership](#) in Northern Ireland, echoed Stephanie's comments and added "Remember – you can either fall off or through the roof of a farm building!"

Over to Wales, where their story of the day focussed on Pembrokeshire dairy farmer Meurig Harries. A slip of judgement when he was trying to remove a shed roof in November 2012 could have had fatal consequences. Meurig was given short notice that his building contractors would be making a start on fitting the new roof to his cubicle shed so he needed to remove the old roof 'pdq'. Unfortunately, Meurig's helper was afraid of heights so Meurig climbed onto the old roof.

"I had walk boards and used a grinder to remove the old nail heads" explained Meurig. "I was then passing whole sheets down to him to save damaging the asbestos sheets. Everything was going fine, but his helper had to leave. Meurig recalled what happened next: "I was now working alone, and the sheets weren't coming off as easily, I had to regrind some of the nails and when the cable snagged in the nails I gave it a tug and a little lift and the cable swung loose. I stepped back, off the walk board and fell through the gap in the roof sheets.

Meurig fell and hit the passageway, avoiding the concrete kerbstone, but soon realised that he was in trouble as he couldn't get up. He was on his own and didn't have his mobile phone. Fortunately, his father arrived on the farm soon after to see how things were going and found his injured son lying on the ground. Meurig was brought to the house where his family alerted the emergency services.

Luckily, he got away with a dislocated shoulder, four fractures in his pelvis and bruising of the head. He remained in hospital for four days but discharged himself early. Unable to do anything for a month followed by a period of heavily limited mobility and ongoing

physiotherapy, Meurig has regained movement and use of his shoulder but the accident has had recurring consequences.

He explains: "Five years on and my shoulder is still weak and although my pelvis repaired well I do suffer with my hips. Almost as bad as my injuries was the timing of the accident as my farm worker was also off work and we were going into the winter. That left my poor dad who is in his 70s and trying to retire back in the thick of it with all the responsibility. I was very lucky in that a lad who was doing some relief milking for me was able to take on most of the milking otherwise I don't know what would have happened. It all put severe pressure on my dad." Meurig reflects on the aftermath of the accident: "Nowadays I can no longer stomach any sort of heights and ladders are a No-No! I have had more reroofing to do and I got the shed erectors to do all the work and wouldn't consider trying to do it myself again.

"In hindsight I think things could have been a lot worse and I was very lucky, but, as it was, things were bad enough. The whole exercise caused a lot of upset and also was a big financial drain on the business but I'm still here....."



'Falling object' incidents

Another 'survivor' from Wales also shared his potentially fatal accident in a short [film](#). Rhys Lewis is a 27 year old 4th generation farmer, who was paralysed from the waist down when a tree he was cutting down split and fell on him.

And finally, to Scotland, where no less than the President of NFU Scotland, Andrew McCornick, shared how he was injured earlier this year when he dropped a concrete panel on his foot, crushing it and sustaining fractures to his toe... resulting in a supportive boot to be worn for many weeks, and lots of jokes – but also questions – at NFU Scotland Headquarters!

Andrew spoke in vivid terms; "If it had been anybody else you would be thinking how you could be so bloody stupid." He explains: "Well it was me and I was bloody stupid. You can take the word bloody either way, but I suggest in this context take it as the life maintaining fluid, just to get it past the editor, but you will know what I mean.



"It was a Saturday night. My son had been pushing up the silage for the night for the cows and one of the feed barrier concrete panels (measuring 6m x 0.5m x 100mm) fell into the feed passage amongst the cows. He came to me to rectify the situation as the cows would be standing on it and silage would be getting wasted. Tools deemed appropriate included crow bars, pinch bars and two hardy farmer-types, but all proved ineffective, so a tractor and loader were brought in. It seemed to be going well until there was a shuddering at the loader end."

"All I can tell you was the half-lifted panel was no longer half-lifted. Myself and the pinch bar had failed to keep up our end of the job and it had fallen again. This time though my foot was below it. I can honestly say I didn't go 'Oops!'"

"Accident and emergency are fairly quiet at 7.30pm on a Saturday night and I am very grateful for the care and x-rays that I was given. I had the front of my foot crushed, sustained fractures on my toe and there was a lot of blood and bruising."

Andrew concluded: "Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Had I not been in such a rush to get the panel up to get on with other things and thought how to do it a bit smarter; had I left the tractor do the lifting at its end and put wood at my end to prop it up as it was rising; all this could have prevented my foot ending up under that slab."

"My advice – take your time and think through the job properly, don't try to cut corners."

As Stephanie Berkeley (coordinator of Farm Safety Week) says: "It is human nature to think 'it won't happen to me,' but unfortunately it can, especially if we continue to take risks, whether major or minor. Taking preventative, proactive measures is one of the best things we can do for our farm and workers. Most preventative practices are common sense. Tragically, most accidents are caused by simple factors such as habit, haste, fatigue, and improperly maintained machinery. We hope that by hearing about the experiences of high profile members of the industry such as Andrew, and families like the Fisher family, we can persuade farmers of all ages that this week, and every week, farm safety is a lifestyle, not a slogan."

For more information on Farm Safety Week visit [Yellow Wellies](#) or follow @yellowwelliesUK on Twitter/Facebook using the hashtag **#FarmSafetyWeek**.