

# Construction site safety a concern as injury stats rise

According to the Federated Employers Mutual Assurance Company (FEM), there were 47,844 injuries requiring medical attention in the period 2015 to 2020. Two of the major contributors to the injuries sustained on construction sites are 'falling to different levels' and 'struck by'.



Deon Bester, occupational health and safety manager, MBAWC

Deon Bester, occupational health and safety manager at Master Builders' Association Western Cape (MBAWC), explains that 'falling to different levels' and 'struck by' are two descriptions used in the statistical reporting system which ties in with the general way of recording and reporting incidents both nationally and internationally.

**Falling to different levels:** This definition typically describes an incident in which a person falls while working in an elevated position, such as from a ladder or a scaffold.

**Struck by:** This definition captures a number of different types of incidents. For instance, a person struck by a motor vehicle while working next to a public road would be classified as a 'struck by', as the person was struck by a moving vehicle. Other typical examples of 'struck by' injuries would include a brick or timber boards falling on someone.

The FEM stats for the period 2015 to 2020 clearly indicate that there is a serious problem in construction regarding these two specific areas, and it

requires immediate attention. Consider the following:

- There were 47,844 injuries requiring medical attention recorded for this period.
- A total of 5,220 cases of persons falling to different levels were recorded for this period.
- A total of 15,752 cases of persons being 'struck by' were recorded for this period.
- 'Struck by' and 'falling to different levels' account for 44% of all accidents.
- 'Struck by' and 'falling to different levels' account for 35% of all fatal accidents.
- 'Struck by' and 'falling to different levels' account for 2,072 people becoming permanently disabled, which is 46% of all persons with disabilities.

The medical costs attributed to 'struck by' and 'falling to different levels' injuries totalled R618,229,587, which is 33% of the total cost of injuries.

## Urgent need for stringent measures

There is thus an urgent need for stringent measures to be put in place to assist in reducing the number of injuries sustained onsite. This can be achieved by not only creating a healthy and safe working environment, but also ensuring that employees always receive the correct training.

Training ought to be ongoing and inclusive, providing employees with an opportunity to share their input with regards to safety protocols and processes. Employees also need to start holding their employers accountable when these processes are not adhered to, and vice versa. By doing this, employers who are neglecting health and safety processes can be reported to the Department of Employment and Labour inspectors.

"As the Master Builders' Association Western Cape, we continuously strive to assist our members with health and safety

compliance processes through ongoing interactions to ensure that they are prioritising worksite safety,” says Bester.



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Mbrag Evans 29 Sep 2021



### Safety training

In order to lower the level of accidents which occur onsite, employers need to ensure that their workforce is constantly trained on issues relating to health and safety, and to this end, the MBAWC provides its members with the requisite training. The MBAWC also has a solid working relationship with FEM, which provides workmen’s compensation cover in the construction industry. It is through this relationship that the MBAWC is able to lend support services to its members, as well as to FEM policyholders.

While ‘falling to different levels’ and ‘struck by’ are being highlighted, the construction industry should not lose sight of all the other accidents that occur on a daily basis in South Africa.

“On average, about 36 people are injured on construction sites daily. This figure relates to employers who are insured by FEM, which means the figure could be slightly higher, considering that injuries are likely to occur in the informal construction sector as well. Our aim as the MBAWC is to assist all our members in reducing the daily cases of injuries, as we believe that no employee should be injured or lose their life at their place of work,” concludes Bester.

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