

# HSE inspector Jennifer French talks gender bias on International Women's Day



HSE inspector Jennifer French supporting IWD2022

Jennifer French has been as HSE inspector for over seven years. She works in the Field Operations Division, the largest operational inspectorate in HSE, which covers many employment sectors including agriculture, general manufacturing, engineering, food and drink, entertainment, education, health services, local and central government and domestic gas safety. To mark International Women's Day 2022, Jen shares some of her experiences of encountering gender bias when she's been out on site visits and what she loves about her job.

"I graduated with a degree in German, but didn't know what I wanted to be. Then I came across this job as an HSE inspector which looked interesting and it's been the best thing I ever did.

"Being a health and safety inspector at HSE means having a lot of regular contact with people in all different types of industries, but the vast majority, such as engineering or construction, are male-dominated. As a woman it can be quite intimidating at first to approach a business full of men unannounced and make yourself heard. It is quite striking how often I am talked over or referred to as 'love' or 'dear' or, at times, just simply ignored.

"At one point I was acting as a coach to a new (male) trainee inspector. During inspections I was often leading and he would be quietly observing. Frequently I'd ask a duty holder a question and they would turn to my trainee and answer him instead. It sounds like such a cliché, it's almost laughable, but sadly it highlights that gender bias and assumptions still exist.

"I have been called a 'piece of skirt' to my face on site visits and been

referred to in email correspondence as 'Jen, the health and safety bird'. A quick riposte and a roll of the eyes, all done with a smile, is usually enough to make it quite clear that I won't stand for it and it usually get easier from there. Nonetheless, it's disappointing that women can still face such comments in the workplace. One of my favourite things about being an inspector is having the chance to challenge gender stereotypes on a daily basis.

"As well as being an Inspector, I am also the co-chair of HSE's Gender Equality Network and am proud of the fact that 55% of inspectors in Field Operations Division are women. We work every day to make workplaces safe and reduce ill health, injury and death."

---

## [Farmer sentenced after child fatally injured in fall from farm vehicle](#)



The mother of a four-year-old boy who fell from a farm vehicle and was run over sustaining fatal injuries has called for a change in attitude in agriculture.

Today, farmer Brian Nutter was given a suspended prison sentence following the death of his nephew Harry Lee.

Wigan Magistrates' Court heard that on 8 July 2019, Harry was riding on the cab footplate of a telescopic handler driven by his uncle Brian at a farm in Newchurch-in-Pendle. As the vehicle turned into a field, Harry fell from the footplate and was fatally crushed beneath the wheels.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found there were insufficient measures in place to ensure the safety of children on the farm. The Prevention of Accidents to Children in Agriculture Regulations 1998,

prohibits children under the age of 13 from riding on, or operating, vehicles used in agricultural operations. Furthermore no-one, including children, should ride on the footplate of any agricultural machine.

Brian Nutter of Tynedale Shippon, Newchurch-in-Pendle, Lancashire pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. He was given a 26-week prison sentence suspended for 18 months, a community order, which included 250 hours of unpaid work and ordered to pay costs of £5,154.

Mum Sarah Nutter said: "Losing a child at any age is a traumatic experience, but losing a child in such deeply tragic circumstances is completely life changing. The event of Harry's death has and will have a lasting effect that I, and my family will never get over.

"Farming is a lifestyle and a way of life. If we could go back and make different decisions and do things differently, we would certainly do so. We have had to learn the hard way.

"The dangers to children on farms are often not appreciated when you live with them, but they should be at the forefront of all our minds every single day.

"I hope the effects of Harry's accident will change the attitude of people living on farms and make them think twice about the dangers their children are exposed to and how easily accidents can be avoided."

Dad Martin Lee said: "Harry, so passionate about farming even at four-years-old, was very much my legacy, the person who would take on the farm.

"Always smiling, Harry had a love for life that brought joy to all those around him and certainly lived his life to the full.

"He was a loving, caring, kind and bright child, full of affection for his family. It is a tragedy that he was needlessly taken from us too soon.

"His death has traumatised and deeply impacted the whole family."

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Shellie Bee said: "This is a deeply sad and upsetting incident for all involved. Harry, a four-year-old child, lost his life in what was a wholly avoidable incident caused by a failure to protect him from farm work activities. Harry should not have been in the workplace nor allowed to ride on farm machinery.

"Farms can appear to be exciting places, but they are busy workplaces with moving machinery and vehicles, livestock, chemicals and many other significant hazards.

Each year, children are killed and many more are seriously injured as a result of farming work. Often the child is a close relative to those managing and running the farm.

"The best way to keep children safe, particularly young children, is to keep them out of the farm workplace altogether. If taken onto the farm, to working

areas, this must be carefully planned. The child should be fully supervised by a responsible adult who is not engaged in any other activity.”

She added: “In addition to the general health and safety duties to protect children. There is specific law that prohibits children under the age of 13 years from riding on or operating agricultural vehicles used in the course of agricultural operations.

“Harry’s family hope that their story will make the wider farming community take steps to fully protect the safety of any child who may be on the farm.”

**Notes to Editors:**

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [legislation.gov.uk/](http://legislation.gov.uk/)
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. For more information on child safety in agriculture: [Agriculture: Children and public safety](#)

---

## [Construction company prosecuted after workers fall from height](#)

A construction company has been sentenced following an incident where two bricklayers fell from height during the construction of a parapet wall.

Manchester Magistrates’ Court heard that on 31 October 2019, two employees suffered serious injuries at a property in Over Alderley, Cheshire when the makeshift platform they were working on collapsed. The two men, along with plywood boards and bricks, fell approximately eight feet to the concrete floor below. The first man sustained fractured ribs, severe bruising and a large wound to his leg, the second man sustained severe bruising to his knees.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that H Cumberbirch & Sons Limited did not properly plan the work at height, in that the risk assessment and method statement by failing to consider how the parapet wall would be constructed and how the risk of falling from height would be prevented. The company failed to ensure that there were suitable measures in place for preventing the employees from falling from height and they were left to work out how best to carry out the work with the equipment they had available. The work at height was not adequately supervised to

ensure that it was carried out safely.

H Cumberbirch & Son Limited of Fence Avenue in Macclesfield pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 4(1) of the Work at Height Regulations 2005. The company was fined £36,000 and ordered to pay costs of £2,824.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Sinead Martin said: "This incident could have been prevented had the company properly planned the work at height and identified and implemented suitable control measures, such as platforms for preventing falls through the joists and scaffolding at the roof edges.

"Falls from height are the number one cause of serious injury and death in the construction industry."

**Notes to Editors:**

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [legislation.gov.uk/](http://legislation.gov.uk/)
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. For more information on working at height visit: [Work at Height](#)

---

## **[HSE focuses on health and safety in the construction industry in Birmingham](#)**

With the number of new construction schemes started across Birmingham City Centre almost doubling in 2021<sup>[1]</sup>, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are sending inspectors out to sites to ensure firms are complying with health and safety regulations, it announced today (Thursday 3 March).

As the city prepares to host the 2022 Commonwealth Games in just 140 days' time, the HSE has noted increased development across the city potentially raising risks for both workers and the public.

Sarah Hill, one of the HSE inspectors leading the campaign, commented:

"With a high volume of construction sites in the busy city centre, there is inevitably more potential for incidents which can result in life-changing injuries or worse and working environments which can pose respiratory risks and are hazardous to workers' health and well-being. This week, HSE colleagues and I will be visiting sites across the city to check that employers are managing risk and keeping workers and the public safe. The

fatal injury rate in the construction sector is around four times the all-industry rate, while over 3,500 builders die each year from cancers related to their work, so this is a reminder to employers that there is no room for complacency or non-compliance.”

During a visit, inspectors look to see how companies keep their workers, and anyone affected by the work they do, healthy and safe. In the event that an employer is breaking the law, an inspector may deploy a range of measures such as issuing an improvement notice which allows a minimum of 21 days for the issue to put right or, in the case of the most serious breaches, prosecution.

Sarah Hill added:

“The majority of work-related illness, injuries and fatalities are wholly avoidable if those responsible for the welfare of their workers follow health and safety guidance and regulation. Construction is a high risk industry, but those that work in it are as entitled as everyone else to go home safe and well at the end of the day.”

Health and safety statistics for the construction industry across the UK:

- 39 fatal injuries to workers in 2020/21
- 74,000 workers suffering work-related ill health (average over 2018/19-2020/21)
- 61,000 non-fatal injuries (averaged over 2018/19-2020/21)
- Four fatalities amongst members of the public.[\[2\]](#)

- ENDS –

#### Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk)
2. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

[\[1\]](#) Deloitte Birmingham Crane Survey 2022 [Birmingham Crane Survey 2022 | Deloitte UK](#)

[\[2\]](#) Data up to March 2021, published 16 December 2021 [Construction statistics in Great Britain, 2021 \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

---

## A letting company and its director have been fined for gas safety failings

A letting agent company and its director have been fined for failing to carry out essential safety checks on gas appliances in their rental property.

Chelmsford Magistrates' Court heard how the landlord, Belleview Property Limited (Belleview), failed to carry out the annual gas safety check at their rental property in Colchester, Essex. Belleview were served with an Improvement Notice requiring the checks to be carried out, but they failed to do within the specified timeframe.

They also failed to provide details of the tenancy agreement when requested to do so by a Health and Safety (HSE) inspector using her powers under Section 20 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. The investigation found that Belleview's failures were committed with the consent of, or were attributable to neglect on the part of, Adrian Ellis, as the sole director of Belleview.

The Court heard how Adrian Ellis had previously been prosecuted by HSE for failing to undertake gas safety checks at properties owned and rented out by him as an individual. Belleview had also been subject to HSE enforcement twice in the last five years relating to its failure to arrange gas safety checks at properties rented out by it, including the property subject to the current case.

Belleview Property Limited of 15 Station Road, St Ives, Cambs PE27 5BH pleaded guilty to breaching the Gas Safety Installation and Use Regulations 1998, Regulation 36(3), for failing to comply with the requirements of the Improvement Notice served under Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Section 20 and failing to comply with the requirement to provide information under Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Section 20 was fined £12,000 with £2,245.28 costs.

Director Adrian Ellis of 4 Leech's Lane, Colchester, Essex C04 5EP pleaded guilty to breaching Section 37(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and was fined £3,000 with £2,245.28 costs.

Each defendant was ordered to pay a further £170 as a government surcharge.

After the hearing HSE inspector Jessica Churchyard said: "Landlords must

ensure gas appliances at their tenanted properties are maintained in a safe condition and are checked by a Gas Safe Register engineer at least every 12 months.

“HSE will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action against those that fall below the required standards.”

**Notes to Editors:**

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [gov.uk/](http://gov.uk/); [www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/faqlandlord.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/faqlandlord.htm)
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>