

Mechanics warned of the life-threatening dangers of working under vehicles

- Twenty-one workers in motor vehicle repair industry killed in last five years, HSE figures show.
- More than half of these deaths (13) were caused when work took place under a vehicle that wasn't properly supported.
- Mechanics urged to challenge "this will only take me a minute" culture.
- Classic Motor Cars Ltd supports HSE's call for better safety with motor vehicles.

Leading voices in motor vehicle repair have teamed up with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to warn of the dangers of working under vehicles without proper equipment.

Figures recorded by HSE in the five years up to March 2022 show that 13 workers in the motor vehicle repair industry were killed when work took place under a vehicle that wasn't properly supported. Since April 2022, HSE has become aware of another four cases of workers being crushed to death by an incorrectly supported vehicle.

Leslie House, 61, was working outside his home in Dorset in May 2020 when he was crushed to death by the Land Rover Freelander he was underneath, which had rolled off the wooden blocks Les used to prop it up.



Leslie House, with his dog Ebby

Les was a self-employed agricultural engineer, repairing the car for a customer, and was only months from retirement. He was pronounced dead at the scene by the emergency services.

Official and anecdotal reports of a wide range of working practices gone wrong are leading to fears mechanics and enthusiasts are putting their lives in danger routinely.

HSE has guidance on [working safely under motor vehicles](#) being repaired and has also issued a safety alert for [air suspension systems on vehicles](#).

Classic Motor Cars (CMC), experts in classic car restoration with their own dedicated workshop, are supporting HSE's call to the industry.

"I am saddened but not surprised to hear of these tragedies," said Tim Griffin, Production and Engineering Director at CMC.

"The situation could get worse as people and businesses may cut costs with higher energy bills", said Tim, who oversees a team of experienced engineers and technicians. "My plea is that it's never a good time to cut corners – the stakes are too high."

Fiona McGarry, an HSE inspector who works with the motor vehicle repair trade said: "One death is too many – to us, these tragedies could easily have been avoided, but they keep happening. Sadly, the phrase we hear too often is 'this will only take me a minute'. It is crucial the correct equipment is used when working under vehicles."



HSE's Fiona McGarry

The annual death rate in the motor vehicle repair industry is 1.62 deaths per 100,000 workers – around four times the average rate across all industries. In total, 21 workers in the motor vehicle repair industry have been killed in the last five years – 13 of which were caused by work under a poorly supported vehicle.

As Britain's workplace regulator, HSE is officially notified of work-related

fatal and certain non-fatal accidents across England, Scotland and Wales. Alongside the 13 deaths, there are many more non-fatal injuries and near misses following work under poorly supported vehicles.

Fiona McGarry continued: “While our figures relate specifically to motor vehicle repair, work on vehicles happens across industries including transportation and agriculture. We all need to ensure work on vehicles is carried out safely, regardless of sector.

“We are becoming increasingly concerned about the scale of the issue. Failure to learn from near misses or injuries will risk lives.

“Some of these issues relate to smaller garages – places that are hard to reach. We have always had a strong relationship with the motor vehicle repair sector, and we respect the expertise of these small businesses.

“But as the issue has persisted, we needed to raise awareness of the issue together. It is therefore important CMC and the Garage Equipment Association are encouraging everyone who works on vehicles – at work, or at home – to check HSE’s guidance.

“There are simple control measures which can avoid tragic cases like that of Les House.”

Julian Woods, CEO of the Garage Equipment Association said: “We consider health and safety to be of the utmost importance to our industry and any loss of life should be considered an unacceptable situation.

“We drive to improve health and safety not only for our members but in the industry as a whole. It’s all too easy to think it will never happen to me or it will only take a second to sort, so skip safety items to get the job done quickly, but these statistics are unacceptable.

“We all need to be thinking of not only ourselves but everybody’s health and safety. If we see an unsafe act we should raise it up and not just turn a blind eye and keep walking.”

HSE’s advice to the trade:

Never work beneath a vehicle that is only supported on jacks:

- Use axle stands that are in good condition and inspected every year
- Use stands on firm, level ground and securely located under a strong point on the vehicle
- Securely chock wheels remaining on the ground
- Do not exceed the rated capacity of the stand

Never work beneath a cab or tipping trailer unless it is propped:

- Always prop cabs, trailers etc that could drop under their own weight
- The prop should be locked in position before gaining access
- If there is no prop fitted, or if one is fitted but you are unsure it will be effective, provide your own

Never crawl beneath a vehicle fitted with air suspension unless it is properly supported:

- Prevent movement of air suspension, either by using suitably rated props or stands to prevent the chassis lowering or by deflating the system
- Don't tamper with the ride height for the purpose of recovery or repair

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.
2. Based in Shropshire, [Classic Motor Cars](#) provide customers with a range of services from full nut and bolt restorations to storage. The company workshops cover over 40,000 sq. ft, with highly trained team members, all keen to provide their expert assistance. From spare parts and routine servicing to full restorations, the company has been trusted with the country's most prestigious vehicles.