

Excavator Quick Hitches: HSA Safety Alert

Quick hitch devices are used on earth moving equipment for the removal and attachment of equipment such as buckets and rock breakers. These devices depend on positive hydraulic pressure and/or mechanical locks or safety pins to hold buckets



and other attachments in place. The use of quick hitch mechanisms on excavators and other earth moving equipment is common practice, as these allow operators to easily change buckets or attachments. The failure to adequately inspect, maintain and operate these mechanisms according to the manufactures recommendations can lead to the introduction of unacceptable levels of risk.

The HSA has issued their warning following a number of fatal and serious accidents in the construction industry in recent months, where excavator buckets became detached and fell onto workers. On 9th of January, 57-year Frank Callaghan was killed instantly after being struck by the bucket of a mechanical digger on a building site in Milford, Co. Donegal. He was working on site of a 60-house development near the town when a bucket is believed to have become detached from a mechanical digger, falling on him and killing him instantly. The digger was moving slabs of concrete at the time of the accident. On the 5th of February, 41-year-old Gordon Richards, a quarry company employee, died when he was struck by the bucket of an excavator which was being moved onto a trailer from a site near Caragh Lake, Co. Kerry.

Commenting on the issue of excavator buckets, senior construction inspector with the HSA, Paula Gough said "In a number of cases investigated by us, involving quick hitch devices, it was found that the safety pin had not been inserted and the bucket became detached from the quick hitch, striking a worker".

The HSA states that where earthmoving equipment fitted with quick hitch devices is being operated on a site there is a need to ensure a safe system of work is used so that



- no worker is allowed to work within reach of an excavator bucket or rock breaker
- mechanical locking pins are used correctly to prevent an uncontrolled release.

The Authority advises construction employers and plant operators to:

- review operating procedures and inspection practices to ensure that quick hitch mechanisms are used correctly and in line with the manufacturer's recommendations
- review maintenance and inspection practices to ensure that quick hitch mechanisms are maintained in a clean and fully serviceable condition
- provide supervision, monitoring and checking to ensure compliance with work procedures by Workers and plant operatives.

