

HSE visibility campaign causing confusion on site

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THE HEALTH and Safety Executive's campaign to improve plant operators' all-round vision has come under fire for causing confusion on site and for placing unreasonable demands on both owners and manufacturers.

In the latest phase of its workplace transport safety campaign the HSE is focusing attention on visibility aids for telehandlers, whose design it believes creates poor visibility and causes accidents.

The HSE says that fitting additional mirrors or CCTV is essential to prevent workers being struck or run over by reversing machines.

It has written to manufacturers asking them to come up with appropriate ways of improving visibility, particularly to the rear and offside of the machines, by this July.

But safety officers on some sites are already demanding that telehandlers have additional mirrors fitted before they are allowed onsite in response to the HSE campaign.

Owners have been left unsure whether fitting the devices will invalidate the manufacturer's warranty or even impede the machine's normal operation.

One owner said: "Welding extra mirrors to the rear ends of equipment makes the machine longer and increases the turning circle. If site safety officers ask us to fit them to machines that work on highways, such as excavators, this runs the risk of catching passing traffic.

And whose responsibility would that be?"

The HSE and telehandler manufacturers were due to meet as Construction News went to press to thrash out a resolution to the problem.

Manufacturers have complained that they are being rushed into a decision that could affect the way the machine operates and for which no design standards have been set.

One aggrieved representative said: "No-one wants accidents, but we need to pull together - if design changes need to be made, we need to be sure there is an agreed standard. They can't just tell us to slap mirrors on if manufacturers have ensured that machines are already compliant with the regulations."

The Construction Plant-hire Association, which recently fended off an HSE plan to have extra visibility devices on cranes instead of banksmen, stressed that the customer would have to pick up the cost for additional equipment.

CPA director Colin Wood said: "If contractors want to add equipment over that required by Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations, they will have to pay for it."