Finger Fracture During Manual Handling

SAFETY ALERT

Description of incident:

The scaffolding crew were tasked with dismantling a long-term scaffold structure. The task required scaffolding components to be passed from one individual to another.

After being passed down a 4-metre ladder beam, the Injured Party (IP) carried the beam to the storage area then went to position the ladder beam into a scaffold rack. As the IP attempted to slide the ladder beam into the scaffold rack (picture 1), his left hand became caught between the ladder beam he was holding, and another ladder beam already situated in the rack (picture 2).

This resulted in the IP suffering a significant injury to the middle finger of his left hand resulting in the need for surgical intervention to repair the top of the finger.

Picture 1

Picture 2

Findings:

- The Health & Safety Executive's L23 guidance document on manual handling recommends a maximum of 25kg load at elbow height for men. The ladder beam weighed in excess of 25kg. Priority should have been given to the use of team lifts on this occasion.
- The IP was wearing general purpose gloves – the toolbox talk stated that impact protection gloves should be worn. The use of impact gloves could have reduced the severity of the injury.
- The Manual Handling Risk Scorecard was incomplete as it did not contain information on the load, load weight, lift frequency and the number of personnel/lifters.
- The scorecard completed by the scaffold team indicated the weight of the load did not present an injury risk.

Key Learning:

Review existing risk assessments and ensure suitable and sufficient controls are documented with regards to the manual handling of both general scaffolding and long-term/aged scaffolding.