

# Safety in numbers

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) legislation [1] places a duty on employers to report deaths, major injuries, three day injuries to employees (injuries that result in three or more days off work) and injuries that result in members of the public being taken to hospital.

In a state school setting, the employer is the local authority, teachers and support staff are employees and pupils are members of the public. Reports are made to the Health and Safety Executive.

The HSE has sent us the Scottish education sector RIDDOR data for session 2009 / 2010. In that period, there was one fatality, when an electrician was killed by a high fall. Around 350 employees were injured, with numbers in primary and secondary schools roughly equal. Approximately a quarter of those hurt were teachers or technicians. The number of reports where the subject was a member of the public was 632, the vast majority being pupils, with almost twice as many secondary as primary children injured. On average, each Scottish secondary school had one RIDDOR incident involving a pupil in this year-long period.

The figures break down the accidents by type. We were particularly interested in those that came under the heading of “contact with harmful substance”, though we have no way of knowing if they happened in science or technology classes. Only 2% of pupil accidents and 3% of employee accidents fell into this category. The most common causes of injuries were slips and trips, accounting for 40% of the total.

Remember that we are not talking about trivial “skint ma knee” injuries here. Overall, the HSE data reinforces the view that schools are largely safe places in which to work and learn. This is not complacency. Indeed, schools are safe because employers and employees are, by and large, not complacent about safety, particularly when the risk is potentially high if not carefully controlled. As ever, there are areas where we can improve, particularly with respect to slips and trips. The HSE’s website [2] has very useful information, including guidance, advice and case studies.

## References

[1] <http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/riddor.htm>

[2] <http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/index.htm>