

General Workplace Inspectorate

Promoting Safety and Health in the Workplace

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT ALERT

11 November 2003

Patient Receives Fatal Injuries in Fall

Incident

A patient in a residential care home received fatal injuries when he fell from a sling in a portable patient hoist during a transfer from a bed to a wheelchair.

Circumstances

The sling was placed around the patient while he was lying on his bed.

The sling was then fastened to the four attachment points of the pivot frame on a patient lifting device. As the hoist was pulled clear of the bed the pivot frame handle was pushed down to raise the patient into a sitting position.

The caregivers performing the transfer heard a 'click' and the sling fell away from one of the mounting points by the patient's knee.

The patient fell backwards out of the sling onto the floor and sustained fatal injuries.

Investigation

The OSH investigation showed that the probable prime cause of the accident was that one of the keyhole buckles on the sling had come free from the attachment point on the pivot frame.

It was likely that the buckle was inadvertently placed on the edge of the stud head of the attachment point, rather than being pulled fully home. The incorrect state of attachment is shown in the photograph.

The movement of the patient lifter then probably dislodged the buckle from the supporting point.



Incorrect attachment of the buckle on the stud head.

A contributing factor was that a handling strap attached to the sling near the buckle tended to fall over the attachment point, thus obscuring the buckle and preventing caregivers from confirming the buckle was properly locked into place.

Recommendations

1. Carers need to ensure that the sling buckles are properly engaged with the attachment point.
2. Training in the correct attachment procedure needs to be given.
3. Each caregiver's ability to properly carry out the attachment needs to be checked routinely.
4. A second person should check the status of the attachment where possible.
5. The suppliers of the equipment have modified the design of the buckle system.

Recommendations 1 to 4 will remain in force until all patient hoists that use the present system are no longer in use. This is likely to be some years away.