

10 year anniversary of the Buncefield explosion

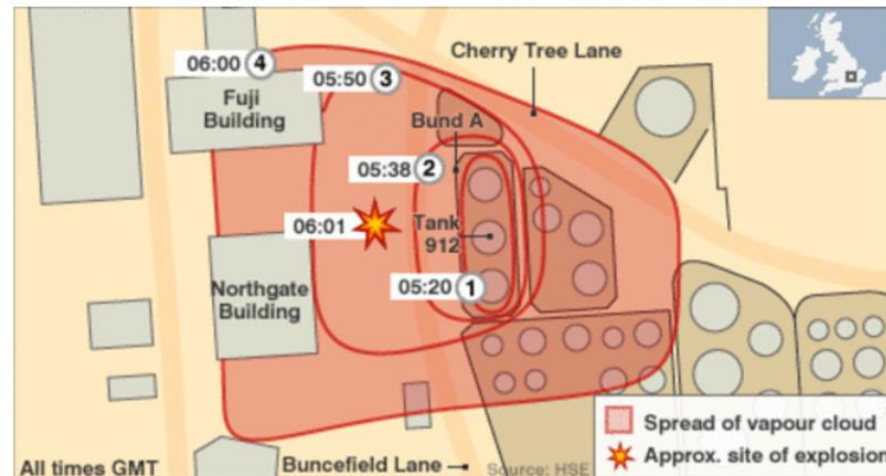
On the morning of 11 December 2005, the UK experienced its largest explosion since World War Two. The huge blast at the Buncefield fuel depot in Hemel Hempstead was heard as far away as the Netherlands and shrouded much of south-east England in smoke.

At the time of the explosion, the Hertfordshire Oil Storage Terminal - co-owned by Total and Texaco - handled more than two million metric tonnes of petrol, diesel and aviation fuel each year and was the fifth largest oil products storage depot in the UK.

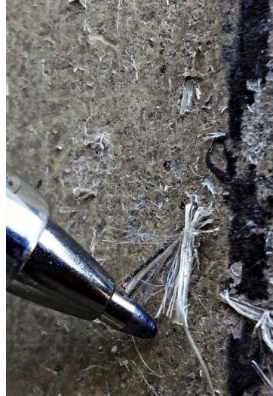
Summary of events:

- Unleaded motor fuel was being pumped into storage tank 912 in the north-west corner of the site
- Staff did not realise capacity had been reached
- Safeguards failed - automatic shutdown did not happen and fuel continued to be pumped in
- By 05:20 GMT the tank was overflowing through roof vents
- A fuel and air vapour cloud formed causing an explosion equivalent to 30 tonnes of TNT, measuring 2.4 on the Richter scale
- Further explosions followed and fire engulfed 20 large storage tanks
- The blaze took five days to put out

250,000 litres of petrol leaked
Five days to extinguish the blaze
53m litres of water
180,000 litres of foam



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Fall kills scaffolder just weeks before wedding

Two companies have been fined a total of £1.3m following the death of a scaffolder who was just weeks away from his wedding day.

The court was told John Altoft, 29, from Scunthorpe was killed when he fell to his death after being struck by falling debris inside an industrial tower.

On 18 January 2012, a team from Cape Industrial Services Ltd were installing an access scaffold to enable the relining of the inside of a steel plated tapered cylindrical structure at the Cemex Cement Works in Rugby.

Warwick Crown Court heard the team was working inside the Cyclone 1 tower when concrete debris dropped on to Altoft causing him to fall seven metres to the bottom of the structure causing fatal head injuries.

His colleague Ty Smart was also seriously injured, suffering serious wrist and arm fractures and has been unable to work since the incident.

Inspectors from the HSE told the court that both Cemex UK Operations Ltd and Cape Industrial Services Ltd Scaffolding should have co-ordinated and planned this high risk work to a higher standard.

Cemex UK Operations Limited, Surrey, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act and was fined £700,000 and was ordered to pay £90,783.78 in costs.

Cape Industrial Services Limited, Stockley Bridge, Uxbridge, Middlesex pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act and was fined £600,000 and ordered to pay £90,783.78 in costs.

HSE Inspector, Sue Thompson, said: "John Altoft should have been celebrating his wedding, but instead his family suffered a terrible loss.

"This was an entirely preventable incident and proper planning and protection from the foreseeable danger of falling material would have prevented this from happening."

Michelle Altoft, John's mum, said: "John was very loyal and hard working. He turned into the most handsome, caring young man, and I could not be more proud of him. He would help anyone and be there when you needed him.

"I have lost the most precious thing any mother could lose, and will never be replaced – my child."

Carly Sargent, John's fiancé, said: "Even now, two years on I still miss John. Mine and John's life together was taken away from us. We grew up together. He worked hard all his life with the intention of becoming my husband and having a family. This is all he wanted. We both wanted the same things."



John Altoft was killed at work just weeks before his wedding

Electrical explosion leaves worker scarred for life

Two construction companies have been fined £90,000 after two workers were seriously burned, and one scarred for life after they cut into a live 11,000v electrical cable.

Southwark Crown Court heard the labourer and a bricklayer were working in a House of Lords site at Millbank, London, on 1 July 2013, to lay bricks around a manhole.

One of the men, who was 22 at the time of the incident, hit the cable with a jackhammer when removing old brickwork and suffered serious burns to his arms, legs, hands and face. He was in hospital for nearly a month receiving treatment to his injuries.

The other worker, a 63-year-old man, suffered significant burns to his face and neck. He has been treated for the longer term traumatic stress because of the incident and is unable to continue working with drills and machines.

Clive Graham Associates Limited (CGA) of 55 Farrington Road, London, who was the principal contractor for the project, pleaded guilty to a breach of Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and was fined £45,000 with £6,612 in costs.

The employer of the two injured workers, Bellmoor Construction Limited (Bellmoor), pleaded guilty to a breach of Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and was fined £45,000 with £6,612 in costs. The HSE carried out an investigation into the incident and the conditions found at the construction site.

CGA had failed to identify the risk from live electrical cables that had been dug up and exposed, failed to provide information warning that the incident cable was live, and failed to adequately manage the site and the contractor.

Bellmoor also failed to carry out an adequate risk assessment before the work started, failed to provide effective supervision during the work and failed to check competence before allocating tasks including the operation of the jackhammer.

HSE inspector Andrew Verrall-Withers commented after the hearing: "This serious incident should be a warning to the industry about the need to identify the risks to workers' safety before work begins, so they can be protected.

"Employers have a duty to check workers have sufficient skills, knowledge, experience and training before they allow them to use equipment such as jackhammers on construction sites. A key point is to not assume a worker can use the equipment safely, just because they may have operated it previously.

"The ferocious explosion resulted in some serious injuries. This incident could easily have resulted in a fatality, and other employers should take this as a warning about the risks of working near electrical cables."



Costs soar for contractors hit by safety fee scheme

Contractors hit by charges under the controversial HSE Fee for Intervention scheme have seen their bills jump by 40% since it started.

Analysis by legal firm Pinsent Masons shows the average cost of an invoice has now soared to more than £700.

The controversial scheme was introduced in 2012 and allows HSE inspectors to charge contractors for visits when they break safety laws.

Fears are now growing that the HSE could be using the scheme to raise money following funding cuts.

Laura Cameron, Partner at Pinsent Masons, said: "The HSE will need to recoup the funding lost in budget cuts via wider use of the Fee for Intervention scheme.

"The regulator is issuing those guilty of breaches with invoices for increasingly significant sums- signalling that it remains serious about clamping down on non-compliance."



HSE

Health & Safety Executive

HSE's five-year health and safety strategy plans

Employers and employees are among those invited to have their say in the development of the HSE's new five-year strategy.

The new strategy will apply from 2016 to 2020 and cover six themes. The HSE is looking to engage with relevant parties, including employers, workers, local and central government, unions, other regulators and key representative groups.

The six themes are: promoting broader ownership of workplace safety and health; highlighting and tackling the burden of work-related ill health; supporting small firms; enabling productivity through proportionate risk management; anticipating and tackling the challenges of new technology and ways of working; and sharing the benefits of Great Britain's approach.

HSE will announce how people can join in discussions about developing the strategy in the coming weeks. Its plans include events across the country, as well as digital discussion groups and a campaign hashtag – #HelpGBWorkWell.

Information about how people can get involved in discussions on the strategy will be posted on www.hse.gov.uk/strategy



Workers in dark over asbestos threat on conversion job

A house builder has been fined £50,000 after exposing workers to potentially deadly asbestos fibres during the conversion of an office block into residential flats in Witham, Essex.

In July 2012, Marden Homes Ltd was commissioned to convert an office block into residential flats which involved removing a disused boiler and its pipes from the building's former Plant Room.

During the refurbishment work, employees of Marden Homes Ltd disturbed pipe lagging which contained asbestos fibres.

Chelmsford Magistrates Court heard the company had not arranged for a Refurbishment and Demolition Asbestos Survey to be available to the workers on site.

Employees were therefore unable to identify the presence of asbestos before removing the disused boiler and associated pipework and potentially exposed themselves, and other workers, to asbestos fibres.

One of the workers involved had not received any training to enable him to identify whether the materials he was removing were liable to contain asbestos.

The company had, in 2013, received advice from HSE regarding the need for a survey to be carried out prior to work liable to disturb asbestos taking place.

The company also received an Improvement Notice requiring them to provide their employees with asbestos awareness training.

Marden Homes Ltd of Westcliff on Sea, Essex was fined £50,000 with costs of £1413 after pleading guilty to three safety breaches.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE Inspector David King said: "Exposure to asbestos fibres is a serious and well known health risk, so it is essential that duty-holders take suitable and sufficient measures to prevent the disturbance, spread and exposure to asbestos.

"Guidance on managing the risks of asbestos is widely and freely available. Asbestos has been subject to regulations since 1931 and relevant to the construction industry since 1969.

"Therefore failing to take action to identify the location and type of asbestos present during planning of the work, not communicating that information to workers/contractors who may disturb the asbestos and then not taking appropriate measures to protect the health of those exposed is absolutely inexcusable."



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Firm ordered to publicise conviction

A building firm which was fined £200,000 following the death of a 28-year-old worker who was fatally crushed when a 2.9 metre retaining wall collapsed onto him, has been ordered to take out an advert on the Construction Enquirer detailing its prosecution.

This is the first time a publicity order has resulted in an advert being taken out in the trade press. Previously notices have appeared in local papers or on a company's own website.

Linley Developments' ad appeared throughout December on the Construction Enquirer website.

The site's pages are viewed around 60,000 times a day, though the advert does not appear on every page.

The firm was fined £200,000 after pleading guilty to corporate manslaughter and the company's managing director and project manager were both also given suspended prison sentences after pleading guilty to breaching CDM Regulations.

The publicity order states: "Linley Developments Ltd was convicted on 7 September 2015 of corporate manslaughter arising out of the death of Gareth Jones, a subcontracted employee, at a development in St Albans on 30 January 2013.

"Linley Developments Ltd admitted acting in a gross breach of their duty by failing to take sufficient care for his safety. Failings included failing to prepare a risk assessment for the excavation works, failing to assess and monitor the stability of the wall and failing to ensure that the wall did not become unstable as a result of the excavation work."

You can see the publicity order at:

<http://www.constructionenquirer.com/2015/12/01/hse-publicity-order-linley-developments/>

Mild, wet December breaks records

Long-standing weather records have been smashed by a stormy, yet warm December, the Met Office's early figures suggest.

Scotland, Wales and the north-west of England all had the wettest December in more than a century.

A UK mean temperature of 8C (46F) broke records too and would have felt more like a day in April or May.

The Met Office said storms Desmond, Eva and, most recently, Frank were behind the record rainfall, while a humid south-westerly airflow kept it warm.



Rainfall

211mm

176% of average



Temperature

8°C

4.1°C above average



Sunshine hours

27.4

67% of average

Continued...

Scotland recorded the most rain in December (333mm or 13 inches), making it wetter than any calendar month since 1910 and far wetter than the average of 204mm (8 inches).

Wales has only seen more rain fall in a single month once than it did in December 2015 - in November 1929.

Central and southern England escaped the worst of it, with rainfall figures much closer to average.

In between the storms, there were warm, sunny days across the UK.

England saw mean temperatures top 9.4C (50F), compared with an average 4.4C (33F) for December.

The Met Office said that, until the last week in December, the year might have looked unremarkable with a cool spring and a cool, damp summer offset by a mild end to the year.

However, the last week's rainfall made 2015 one of the top 10 wettest years since 1910, when the Met Office's digitised records begin. The wettest was 2000, when 1,337mm (53 ins) of rain fell.

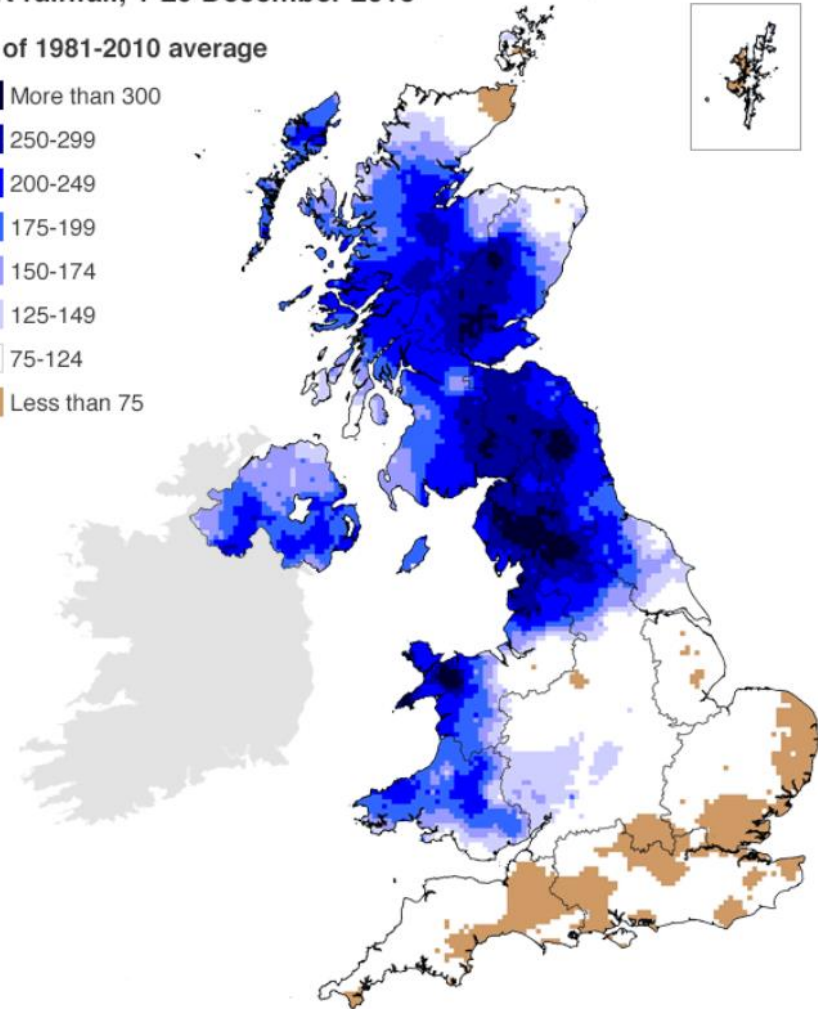
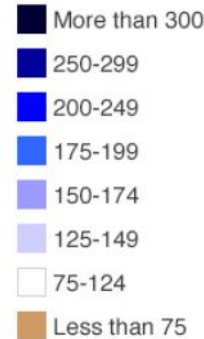
Storm Desmond, in early December, brought record-breaking rainfall to the Lake District.

On Christmas Eve, gales and heavy rain from Storm Eva flooded parts of the north-west of England, Scotland and north Wales.

And in recent days, Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England have borne the brunt of Storm Frank.

UK rainfall, 1-29 December 2015

% of 1981-2010 average



Current El Nino weather 'could be as bad as 1998', says Nasa

The US space agency Nasa has warned that the effects of the current El Nino weather phenomenon could be as bad as those of 1998, the strongest on record. That El Nino played havoc with world weather systems and was blamed for several extreme weather events.

The current El Nino has been linked to several floods and unusually warm conditions in the northern hemisphere.

The phenomenon sees warm waters of the central Pacific expand eastwards towards North and South America.

El Nino is a naturally occurring weather episode which happens every two to seven years.

It usually peaks late in the calendar year, although the effects can persist well into the following spring and last up to 12 months.

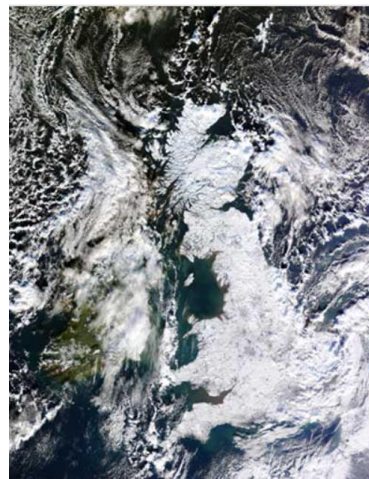
Nasa says the current El Nino "shows no signs of waning", based on the latest satellite image of the Pacific Ocean.

It bears "a striking resemblance" to one from December 1997, the agency says, "the signature of a big and powerful El Nino".

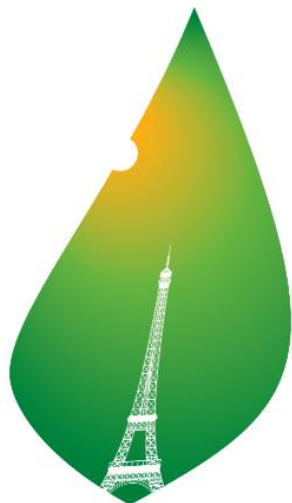
This year's El Nino has been linked to the worst floods seen in 50 years in Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. The floods forced more than 150,000 people from their homes. More than 100,000 of those have been in the Paraguayan capital Asuncion alone.

In the US, 13 people have died in the US state of Missouri as a result of flooded rivers after tornadoes and storms hit the region.

El Nino has been linked to recent flooding in the UK and was said to be partly a factor in the 2009/10 winter that saw much of the UK under a blanket of ice.



UN climate conference update



PARIS2015
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE
COP21·CMP11

Final report

You can access the final report at:

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>

A new landmark deal was reached at the UN climate conference held in Paris.

195 nations agreed to attempt to cut greenhouse gas emissions to a level that will limit the global average temperature to a rise "well below" 2C (3.6F) compared to pre-industrial levels - a level of warming deemed to be the point when dangerous climate change could threaten life on Earth.

What will it mean to you?

It depends on a multitude of factors - who you are, where you live, how you get from A to B, how you earn a living, how you spend your cash and how you like to spend your spare time.

If you live on a small low-lying island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the new agreement offers hope. If nations manage to deliver then it could be the difference between having to flee your ancestral home and starting again thousands of miles away in an unfamiliar foreign land, or being able to plan and build for your family's future.

If you live in an industrialised, developed nation then it all depends on how committed governments and leading businesses are to achieving the goal. It could affect how much tax you pay, it could affect how much it will cost you to run a car - it may affect how much it costs you to feed and clothe you and your family.

Legally binding and non-legally binding agreements

The regular review and submission of emission reduction targets will be binding within the United Nations framework.. So too will the \$100bn fund from developed economies to help emerging and developing nations decarbonise their energy mix - which means moving away from burning fossil fuels to clean energy sources, such as renewables and nuclear.

But emission targets will not be legally binding. These will be determined by nations themselves.

Within the agreement, the targets are known as Intended National Determined Contributions (INDCs). To date, 187 countries have submitted their INDCs. Observers have calculated that all of the targets, if delivered, will only curb warming by 2.7C. This is well above, not well below, the 2.0C goal of the Paris Agreement.

The reason why the targets are not legally binding under international law comes from the 2009 climate summit in Copenhagen, where attempting to impose binding targets on countries was one of the reasons why the talks failed.