

# How to turn a handyman into a hospital case

By Robin Young

THE nation's homes resonating to the sound of whirring drills, thumping hammers and imprecations to the deity as yet another finger is impaled by a misplaced nail can mean only one thing: busy A&E departments as DIY disasters proliferate.

With a flurry of Bank Holidays approaching, insurance companies were vying with each other yesterday to put out the most comprehensively alarmist warnings about the dangers of do-it-yourself.

Halifax General Insurance predicted that hundreds of over-ambitious and ill-prepared enthusiasts would be making trips not only to DIY stores but also to hospital.

"Every year there are about 70 deaths and 250,000 serious injuries related to DIY work," a spokesman said, "with many of them taking place over

Bank Holiday weekends and school holidays."

Howard Posner, the chief executive officer, said: "We know that the vast majority of DIY mishaps result from simple lack of preparation or sub-standard tools and equipment. Claims suggest that a percentage of DIY disasters are a result of distractions caused by children or family pets."

For example, Howard Coldby, 37, fell from a ladder he had been using to refix guttering dislodged when retrieving his small son's kite. Mr Coldby explained that he had been distracted by the family budgie, which flew out of his son's bedroom window.

Mr Coldby, from Birmingham, was lucky. More people are killed or injured using ladders than any other piece of DIY equipment, with more than 30,000 needing hospital treatment each year.

Norwich Union yesterday concentrated its attention on women calling for male help, alleging that nine out of ten women are incapable of dealing with any practical home emergency themselves. Half the women under 34 rely on

their fathers for assistance, the insurer said, because younger men openly admit that they, too, are incompetent in dealing with home repairs.

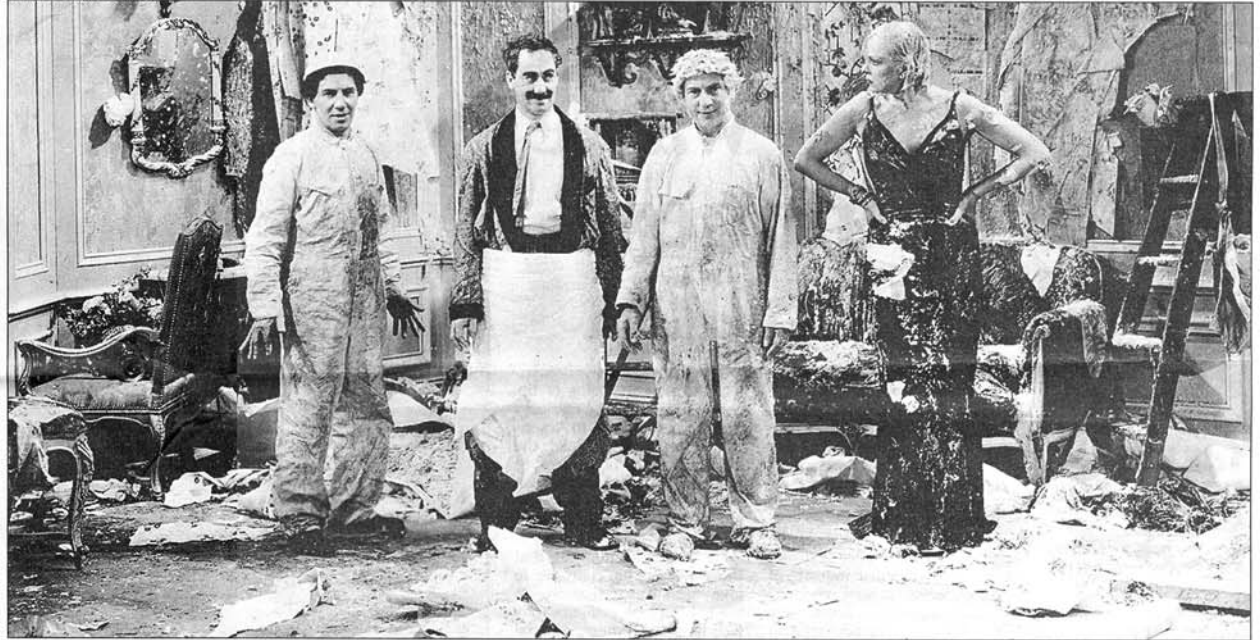
That still leaves one in three "have-a-go" males who would rather give DIY a try than call in a specialist.

Norwich Union, too, claimed that people were not taking basic precautions, while Eagle Star issued a report showing that one in ten of us has to spend more than £1,000 rectifying our botched DIY efforts.

The Eagle Star report put the average cost of rectifying DIY failures at £394, but reckoned that male mishaps cost an average of £516 each, compared with women's more modest £125.

CPP Group, having asked a representative sample of 2,000 adults what they had damaged

MGM / THE KOBAL COLLECTION



Another fine mess: the Marx Brothers, pictured here in their film, *A Day At The Races*, are typical of men whose DIY jobs turn into unmitigated disasters

while tackling DIY tasks, also found that almost a quarter of men in the survey admitted to hurting themselves or damaging their property, but among women the proportion fell to a fifth. According to the

British Chiropractic Association, 10,000 people visit a chiropractor each month with DIY-related injuries, and 3,900 end up in hospital.

The catalogue of home horror stories cited by the con-

cerned companies include a man who lost his hand when his jumper caught in a bench saw, and a window cleaner who fell through his french windows while cleaning his chimney. Peter Purves, the

former *Blue Peter* presenter, was among the victims. He had asked his wife to hold the ladder while he cleaned gutters, but then asked her to make a cup of tea. He fell, breaking both heels, and spent

three weeks in a wheelchair.

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## COUNTING THE COST OF DIY

■ The DIY market is worth £12 billion annually and is growing by 8 per cent a year  
■ People in the North East are the least likely to cause damage by DIY, possibly because 40 per cent never attempt home repairs themselves, compared with 34 per cent nationally

■ Easter is the busiest time of year (B&Q, for example, will sell 3 million pots of paint and 1,100 miles of decorative wallpaper borders)  
■ 12 per cent of Britons have damaged their paintwork, carpeting, flooring, furniture or glazing in the past six months