

CASE STUDY: BROKEN BACK FOLLOWING FALL FROM LADDER



The following case study outlines the prosecution of a chicken processing firm after one of its employees fell from a ladder and broke his back.

Summary

The employee was carrying cladding boards up an unsecured ladder at one of their factories when it slipped from under him and he fell approximately 2.5 metres to the concrete floor. He suffered broken vertebrae in his lower spine which meant he had to wear a back brace and was off work for six months. He has since returned to work but is only able to carry out light duties. The HSE investigation found that a supervisor at the factory had allowed the employee to help another employee in carrying out a maintenance task, but the work was not adequately planned and the company had not provided information to its staff on how to use ladders safely.

Action

The company pleaded guilty of breaching Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 for failing to ensure the health and safety of their employees and were fined £3,500 and ordered to pay additional costs of £3,000.

Advice

The prosecuting inspector said:

“The employee was taken from his usual duties and asked to carry out a task for which he was neither properly trained nor supervised. As a result he suffered a serious and extremely painful injury which caused him to be off work for months. More workers are injured by falling from a ladder than any other access equipment. The company should have been aware of this and ensured that adequate systems were in place so that its employees were not put at risk.”

There are a number of guides aimed at improving ladder safety available on the HSE website:

- Safe use of ladders and stepladders - an employer's guide: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg402.pdf>

- A toolbox talk on leaning ladder and stepladder safety: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg403.pdf>

- Top tips for ladder and stepladder safety: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg405.pdf>