

CASE STUDY: COMPANY FINED AFTER ENGINEER FRACTURED SKULL IN FALL



A Norfolk food company has been prosecuted for safety failings after a 49 year-old engineer fractured his skull and was left partially deaf after a three metre fall.

The worker sustained the serious head injury while investigating a fault with a data logger attached to a cooling unit.

Norwich Magistrates Court heard that he accessed the unit via a free standing ladder resting against the rear of the chiller without any top ties or foot supports to stop it from moving. It slipped as he went to get some tools and he fell three metres to the floor below, banging his head on impact.

The engineer spent four days in Addenbooke's hospital following the incident. He damaged a bone in his right ear, which left him partially deaf and unable to work for a month following the fall. He also has debilitating tinnitus and has only been able to work reduced hours since his injury.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) established that had the ladder been better secured, or a safer alternative provided, such as an elevated work platform, then the fall could have been prevented.

The company was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay £11,690 in costs after pleading guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

After the hearing HSE inspector Joanne Williams said:

"This incident could easily have proved fatal. You do not have to fall from a great height to lose your life and work at height remains one of the most significant causes of fatalities and major injuries in the workplace.

"Extreme caution must be taken at all times, and the onus is on employers to ensure work is properly planned and supervised, and that adequate safety precautions are taken. That didn't happen here, and the engineer has been left with a permanent injury."

For advice or information about working safely at height visit www.hse.gov.uk/falls