

CASE STUDY: COMPANY FINED £600,000 AFTER WORKERS FALL FROM HEIGHT

A telecommunications company has been fined after two of its employees were seriously injured in falls from height.

Teesside Crown Court heard how two engineers had been given a job at an Automatic Telephone Exchange.

One of the engineers was installing a cable through a hole on the first floor along a ceiling level cable tray to the Main Distribution Frame (MDF) on the ground floor. In order to carry out this work he was working on a stepladder in amongst the lighting system. He felt a pain in his right arm and fell from the step ladder. He was taken to hospital with head and back injuries.

The accident was not properly investigated and later that day the work was allowed to continue. The second engineer continued with the work himself, from a different ladder. However he too fell to the ground and was taken to hospital with serious skull and back injuries.

A year after the accident, the first engineer returned to work. However he had lost his sense of smell and taste and required physiotherapy for a number of years. The second engineer received serious multiple fractures of the skull and spine, his sense of smell and taste had been affected, he was blinded in one eye, and has long term memory problems.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) into both incidents, which occurred on 1st April 2010, found that the work had not been properly assessed or planned, despite workers being exposed to such serious risks as working at height close to an electrical system.

Serious failings were also found within the electrical lighting system in that area, where workers were exposed to live metal parts, some at 240 volts. The system was poorly constructed and had not been properly maintained or tested. It is most likely that both engineers received electric shocks which threw them from the ladders.

The company pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, and was fined £600,000 and ordered to pay costs of £60,000.

HSE inspector Laura Lyons said after the hearing: "Work at height and working close to electrical systems needs to be properly assessed and planned so that adequate controls can be put in place. This duty rests firmly with the employer. These life changing incidents could have been avoided if [the company] had provided safe systems of work and ensured that the electrical systems were properly constructed, maintained and tested."