

Company fined after 'perfect' son crushed to death

A company in Hertfordshire has been fined after an employee was crushed to death.

James Rourke lost his life after being struck and run over by an excavator at Sarazen Gardens, Brampton on 18 November 2019.

James and his family had celebrated his sister Katie's 21st birthday the weekend before the fatal incident.



James Rourke

The 22-year-old site engineer had been attaching 'warning' work signs to fencing around the site when he was hit by the vehicle.

James, from Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex, had only joined his employer, Materials Movement Ltd, months before after graduating from the University of Birmingham with a degree in geology in the summer of 2019.

The firm had been hired to undertake ground clearance works at Sarazens

Gardens in preparation for the building of new houses.

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found Materials Movement Ltd had failed to plan and manage the work at Sarazen Gardens. The company failed to properly supervise the work that James and the excavator driver were undertaking to ensure it was safe. The Baldock firm also failed to ensure the work was planned and managed to eliminate any chance of James working near the excavator.

HSE guidance states employers must consider five main precautions needed to control excavator hazards, these are; exclusion, clearance, visibility, plant and vehicle marshaller and bucket attachment. Further guidance on mobile plant and vehicles can be found at: [Construction – Mobile plant and vehicle industry health & safety \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/mobile-plant-vehicle/)

James' mother, Clare, said in her victim personal statement: "The sunshine has been taken from our lives and the dark gap is immense.

"Our profound loss is ever present; James is always missing. Missing from family events, Christmas, birthdays, holidays. Unknown to newborn family members. Unknown to new friends.

"Our house has a bedroom with no owner. Possessions we cannot bear to touch, photographs we cannot look at.

"We were an even family of six, now an odd family of five – incomplete, unbalanced."

Materials Movement Ltd, of Royston Road, Baldock, Hertfordshire, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 15(2) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. The company was fined £133,330 and ordered to pay £8,500 in costs at Peterborough Magistrates' Court on 22 March 2024.

HSE inspector Martin Paren said: "This tragic incident led to the avoidable death of a young man. This death could have easily been prevented if his employer had properly planned, instructed, and supervised the work.

"Our thoughts today are with the family of James, who should have been protected from such harm at work – because of the failings of Materials Movement Ltd he was not."

This prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Jon Mack and supported by HSE paralegal officer David Shore.

Clare added: "James was perfect. He was a big part of our close family unit. He would do anything for us. We cherished him, dearly. He was a compassionate, valued friend to many and was known for his humour and gentle nature."

Notes to editors:

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](https://www.hse.gov.uk/) (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury

and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise.

2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.
4. In February 2020, Materials Movement Ltd was sentenced following a separate HSE prosecution. The company was fined £33,000 following the death of worker Stephen Hampton who died from an explosion on Swain's Lane in Camden on 16 March 2017.