

Company fined after skylight fall puts worker in a six-week coma

A Hertfordshire construction company has been fined after a worker fell through a skylight while working on a six-storey house. The man fell over three metres and received serious head injuries that led to him being in a coma for six weeks.

MH Costa Construction Limited had been completely renovating the property at Moore Park Road, Fulham, London, which included building a basement and an extension.

On 30 November 2018, the worker, along with others, was working on the extension's flat roof when he fell through an opening created for the installation of a skylight. The opening was covered with loose planks and work was in progress immediately by the opening.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found it would have only taken a small movement to dislodge the planks. The worker either fell or stepped onto a plank, which then tipped, causing him to fall to the basement below.

The company's risk assessment records did not consider how to prevent falls through the opening. Additionally, there was no scaffolding or other measures to prevent falls off the sides of the flat roof.

HSE also found other areas where workers could fall, as well as issues relating to manual handling, trip hazards, hazardous wood dust and the storage of flammable materials. There was also no evidence the injured worker had been provided with any formal health and safety related training.

MH Costa Construction Limited of Beauchamp Court, Victors Way, Barnet, Hertfordshire, pleaded guilty to a breach of Regulation 13 (1) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. They were fined £96,000 and ordered to pay £18,965.66 in costs at Southwark Crown Court on 14 November 2022.

HSE inspector Andrew Verrall-Withers said: "It is well known in the construction industry that working on roofs is a high-risk activity. Roofers account for 24% of all workers who are killed in falls from height while at work. It is essential it is carefully planned.

"The worker suffered serious injuries and may never be able to work again. It is just good fortune he was not killed, but it must have been terrible for his family waiting for those six weeks when he was in a coma.

"The company ignored good opportunities to review and improve their arrangements before this tragic incident. HSE had served Notification of Contraventions on the company at two other sites during the previous six months, including highlighting unsafe working at height. At one site in

Fulham a visiting health and safety advisor provided the company with audit reports which raised edge protection issues as needing immediate attention.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (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. hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. More information and guidance can be found at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height>