

Contractor fined after unsafe work leaves food factory employee seriously injured



Contractor Bedford Transmissions Limited has been fined after a man fell from height and was seriously injured at a food factory.

Bedford Transmissions Limited, trading as BT Lerson, had been contracted by Veetee Rice to move and replace machinery within their factory in Rochester.

On 17 August 2020, an employee of Veetee Rice, stood on an unsecured metal plate left in place by BT Lerson the evening before and fell a height of approximately 2.5metres.

The employee's spine and pelvis were damaged in several places which required a lengthy stay in hospital and meant that he was unable to return to work for several months.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that BT Lerson did not properly plan, appropriately supervise, or ensure that the work was carried out safely. BT Lerson failed to identify the fall from height risk and necessary controls in their planning and did not take account of Veetee Rice's employees who were working in the area.

In the lead up to the incident, BT Lerson worked over the top of the hole where the employee of Veetee Rice fell, with no suitable measures to prevent falls of their own workers. BT Lerson then left the factory site with 2 unsecured aluminium plates covering the 2.5 metre drop with only plastic barrier tape marking the area.

That night, the employee was cleaning the work area when he stood on the unsecured metal plates and fell through.

At Folkestone Magistrates' Court on October 10, Bedford Transmissions Limited pleaded guilty for a breach of Regulation 4(1) of the Work at Height Regulations 2005. They were fined £8,000 and ordered to pay costs of £7,194.32.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Peter Bruce said: "This incident could have easily been avoided if Bedford Transmissions had properly supervised and planned this work, to ensure that the work was carried out so far as is reasonably practicable safely.

"Working at height remains one of the biggest causes of fatalities and major injuries. In 2021/22, falls from height accounted for 29 fatal injuries in the workplace.

"It is important that companies properly plan the work they are undertaking at height putting in place measures to protect their own employees as well as others who have access to their work area. It is also important that, when working at an external premise, employers work together and communicate how a site will be left and whether additional measures are needed."

Note 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. www.hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2005/735/contents/made>
3. Guidance related to topics in this case can be found at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg159.pdf>, <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l24.pdf> and <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.pdf>.
4. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>