

Fine for construction company after father of three left paralysed

A father-of-three was left paralysed from the chest down after falling through a ceiling at a house renovation in Derbyshire.

Chesterfield builder Andrew Clifford remained lying face down on the floor for around six hours before he was found by a delivery driver. He judged the time by hearing hourly news bulletins from his radio.

Andrew had been working alone installing first-floor joists during the construction of a house on Main Road in Dronfield. The 51-year-old was carrying out the work on behalf of Paul Freeman Limited – a Mansfield-based company he had worked with for around 20 years.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has prosecuted the company for failing to properly plan work at height.

On the morning of 31 October 2022 Mr Clifford slipped and fell from the first floor to the ground below and was left unable to move.

He spent nearly five months in hospital, with the injuries to his spinal cord so serious they left him paralysed from the chest down, with only limited movement in his hands and arms.

Speaking about the day that changed his and his family's lives forever, Mr Clifford said: "The first thing I recall after my fall was landing on my head.

"From that point it was a very strange feeling as from when I landed, I felt no pain and I couldn't understand why or that I couldn't get up.

"My radio was on and I judged the time by the news. After an hour, I tried to move again and this carried on for around three hours. Eventually, I realised this was serious and I thought I'd better stay still as I didn't want to cause further injuries.

"This wasn't the type of street where people were walking past and as it started to get dark I was getting really worried.

"When I was found by the delivery driver I heard him shout out, 'hello, hello, hello'.

"I think I fell between 9am and 9.30 and wasn't found until 3pm."

He went on to say how being a builder was a job he loved and described the impact the incident has had on his everyday life.

"I can't do anything I used to love doing before," he said.

“Simple things like doing the gardening, washing the car and jobs around the house.

“I can’t even wash or dress myself now.

“I haven’t been upstairs in my house since the accident – my wife and three daughters all sleep upstairs and I sleep alone downstairs.

“Another thing that really upsets me is the thought of not being able to walk my daughters down the aisle when they get married.”

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Paul Freeman Limited failed to ensure that work at height had been properly planned and, as such, no measures had been implemented to prevent falls during the construction of the first floor. Mr Clifford had not been provided with suitable instruction as to how the work should be carried out and was therefore left to work this out on his own.

Working at height remains one of the leading causes of death in the construction industry and [HSE has detailed published guidance on minimising the risks associated with it](#).

Paul Freeman Ltd of Synergy House, Acorn Business Park, Commercial Gate, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 at Derby Magistrates’ Court on 4 November 2024. They were fined £40,000 and ordered to pay costs of £6,263.

HSE inspector Sara Andrews said: “My thoughts remain with Andrew and his family, whose lives have changed dramatically as a result of this preventable incident.

“This case highlights the importance of undertaking a thorough assessment of the risks for all work at height activities and the need to ensure that, where work at height cannot be avoided, suitable control measures are implemented to minimise the risk of serious injury.

“This is even more significant when lone working.”

This prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Neenu Bains and paralegal officer Rebecca Forman.

Notes to editors:

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives.
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. HSE does not pass sentences, set guidelines or collect any fines imposed. Relevant sentencing guidelines must be followed unless the

court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so. The sentencing guidelines for health and safety offences in England and Wales can be found [here](#) and for those in Scotland [here](#).