

Lift maintenance company fined after engineer fatally crushed

A lift maintenance company has been fined after an employee died while working at a factory run by Muller Yogurt and Desserts.

Lift Monitoring Systems Limited, previously known as RJ Lift Services Limited, was fined £200,000 on Monday following a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation into the death of 24-year-old Lewis McFarlin, a lift engineer employed by the Staffordshire company.

Muller was not prosecuted by HSE.

Mr McFarlin was fatally crushed when attempting to repair a goods lift at Muller's Market Drayton factory on 14 January 2020.

Mr McFarlin's mother has said "no one should go to work and not return."



Lewis McFarlin

He and two other lift engineers at Lift Monitoring Systems were on site to work on a different lift before being asked to resolve an issue with the door-opening mechanism on one of the lift landing doors.

While attempting to resolve the issue, Mr McFarlin was on top of the lift car with one engineer in the lift itself and the other outside on the landing. The lift had been placed in inspection mode enabling Mr McFarlin to control the lift from the lift's rooftop. This mode enabled him to assist his colleague, inside the lift, to rectify the issue.

As the work progressed, the lift unexpectedly shifted from inspection mode to normal mode while Mr McFarlin was still on top. This sudden transition caused the lift to move at its normal speed, trapping him in a void between the lift car and the structural elements of the lift shaft.

Mr McFarlin's colleagues tried to release him but were unable to. He had

already lost his life by the time the emergency services arrived at the scene.

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found that there was a failure to cover the void in which Lewis became trapped. Had the void been sheeted, the incident could not have happened.



The lift shaft wall

Mr McFarlin's mother, Leah Salt, said: "Hearing all the evidence this last week has been extremely difficult. Hearing how Lewis' death was easily and reasonably preventable, is heart-breaking. No one should go to work and not return.

"As a family, losing our lovely Lewis and his future, has had a massive impact on all of our lives. Nothing can bring my son home, however, if future lives and families can be protected as a result of this outcome, then Lewis' death hasn't been in vain."

Lift Monitoring Systems Limited, formerly known as RJ Lift Services Limited, of Galveston Grove, Oldfield Business Park, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire, pleaded guilty to failing to discharge the duty imposed upon it by Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £200,000 at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court on 27 November 2023. Costs will be decided at a later date.

HSE inspector Andrew Johnson said: "This tragic and entirely preventable incident led to the loss of a much loved son. The risks associated with working on lifts and the necessary safety measures were well-known to the company.

"Sadly, in this case, the employer failed to meet its responsibilities to put in place simple and well established reasonably practicable measures such as

covering the void in which Lewis became trapped in. Had the company fulfilled its duties, this tragic incident simply would not have happened.”

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>