

Offshore companies fined after grandfather injured on North Sea gangway

Two offshore companies have been fined a combined total of more than £1.2m after an offshore worker's feet were crushed while walking along a gangway over the North Sea.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted Shell and Ampelmann Operations following the incident off the Norfolk coast on 17 October 2017.

Martin Hill, a grandfather of eight from Norwich, says he now struggles to go on walks and carry out simple DIY tasks as a result of his injuries.



The damaged boot Mr Hill had been wearing at the time of the incident

The then 63-year-old was part of a group of maintenance workers being transferred on the Kroonborg support vessel towards Shell's Galleon PG offshore gas rig when the incident happened. The transfer went ahead in conditions of high wind and heavy seas, when it should not have done.

Motion-compensated, or 'walk to work', gangways, are used to access offshore wind farms and rigs. They have a combined mechanical and computerised system to enable them to continue to provide a steady pathway for people transferring from ship to rig or turbine. The distance between the ship and the rig changes with the sea and vessel movement so any such gangway must telescope in and out to keep a full bridge.

As Mr Hill made his way along gangway from the support vessel towards the rig, he did so in the pre-sunrise gloom. Although there was some artificial lighting, there was not enough of it in the right places. Both of his feet got trapped as the gangway telescoped together. The serious nature of the injuries meant he had to be airlifted to hospital and he narrowly avoided having both of his feet amputated.



Mr Hill's trapped boot in the gangway

Now 68, Mr Hill said: "Both of my feet got stuck between the two sections of the gangway and consequently my feet got very badly crushed. When they got the bridge off me I passed out and next thing I knew I was on the medical centre on the ship. Most of the bones in my feet were broken and most of the skin was pulled off. I have used magnetic therapy to help with my injuries which has been a big help.

"I am not 100% now, my feet will play up if I try and do DIY when there are steps or ladders involved, or if I go for a reasonable walk. I like to think it didn't affect me mentally but it did – I haven't returned to offshore work after the incident."

The HSE investigation found that people using the Ampelmann-designed and owned gangway were not sufficiently protected from the risks of entrapment and trip injury at the moving step. Ampelmann simply failed to take all reasonably practicable steps to reduce the risk of people's feet being trapped at the sliding step. Mr. Justice Jeremy Johnson said that, though some efforts were made, "There were some basic errors which persisted over a long time".

Mr. Justice Johnson said of Shell's instructions to the staff conducting transfers "were inconsistent and confusing and spread across several documents. They were not understood by those operating" the gangway transfer system. In addition, Shell also failed to ensure that lighting was in accordance with long-standing guidance available on the HSE website: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg38.htm>. Mr Justice Johnson said in assessing Shell's culpability, "The problems were in place for a considerable time and were far from minor or isolated".

Shell U.K. Limited, of York Road, Lambeth, London, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £1,031,250 and ordered to pay £247,000 in costs at Chelmsford Crown Court on 14 December 2023.

Ampelmann Operations (UK), of Waterloo Quay, Aberdeen, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The company was fined £206,250 and ordered to pay £247,000 in costs at Chelmsford

Crown Court on 14 December 2023.

HSE inspector John Hawkins said: “Offshore equipment, whether used in the course of hydrocarbon extraction, like at the gas rig in this case, or in harvesting renewable energy, such as at a wind turbine, requires maintenance, and maintenance requires reliable and safe access.”

“Walk to work gangways have an important contribution to make towards providing reliable and safe access, but their design and operation must ensure workers are protected from the risk of needless entrapment and serious injury.”

“The sentences passed reflect the importance of specialist companies making sure that all aspects of the equipment they design and deploy are in fact safe, rather than just assumed to be safe. It is important operating companies continually challenge themselves, through effective audit and review of their procedures, to make sure their safety management systems are robust enough and that the safety instructions generated are clear, consistent and in accordance with guidance.

“To have workers exposed to a risk of injury when required to do something as basic as walking to work over a gangway does not reflect the standards expected.”

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.
2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.