

Two companies fined half a million pounds after worker left paralysed

Two companies have been fined more than half a million pounds after a site worker lost the use of his legs following an incident in London.

Westminster Magistrates' Court heard how, on 5 November 2015, Mr Marcel Păduraru, a Romanian construction worker, fell onto and then through a fragile plastic skylight into a basement over three metres below. He suffered a severed spine and will not regain the use of his legs. He was 30 years old at the time of the incident.

Grangewood Builders Limited had been appointed as the principal contractor to carry out a £5,000,000 refurbishment at a large house near Buckingham Palace on Chapel Road, London. Grangewood had engaged Trenchco Limited to carry out specialised demolition work at the site.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that, despite work being carried out directly by the site skylight, neither company checked if it was fragile or took action to stop people falling through it.

Neither company ensured the work was adequately planned and, as a result, safe systems of work were not identified and implemented. Workers had been put at risk from construction activities at the site ranging from demolishing a roof without edge protection to manually handling wood beams weighing an estimated 200kg.

The investigation also found that the Trenchco supervisor directly controlling the work had no formal training relating to supervision and some of the workers, including the Romanian victim, had to rely on unofficial interpreters to pass on instructions and tell them what the health and safety records contained.

Grangewood Builders Limited of Lionel Road, Canvey Island, Essex pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 13(1) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and was fined £270,000 and ordered to pay £7,025.98 in costs.

Trenchco Limited of Clewer Crescent, Harrow Weald, Middlesex pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 15(2) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and was fined £270,000 and ordered to pay £7,025.98 in costs.

HSE inspector Andrew Verrall-Withers commented after the hearing: "The risks relating to fragile skylights being fallen through and the simple solutions to avoid this are well known. The failings at the site were not limited to the unprotected plastic skylight. Other activities such as the demolishing of a roof without edge protection could also have resulted in a serious incident."

“While these companies may have wanted health and safety compliance, their failure to pay enough attention to their actual performance at the site resulted in a tragedy occurring. No one should go to work and return unable to walk again”.

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>

Journalists should approach HSE press office with any queries on regional press releases.