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Abseiling accidents

Abseiling has become a popular access method for certain difficult to reach applications, with abseilers taught to carry out the specific work. However the method which ought to be reserved for jobs where it is the only or the safest method of work, is increasingly being used where these conditions do not apply resulting in an increased number of incidents.

Central (High Rise) Ltd, of Sneinton, Nottingham, was recently fined £132,000 for failing to protect its employees. Brian Collins, 52, was setting up his abseiling equipment to paint a chimney at Sutton Bridge Power Station on the 13th of March 2008, when he fell 34 metres to his death through an open grating in a platform on the chimney.

In a separate incident, on 14 August 2009, two other employees were performing maintenance on the rocks below Nottingham Castle. They attempted to abseil down to a

ledge but did not use a safety line. The first man reached the ledge safely, but the second experienced an uncontrolled descent, falling between eight and 10 metres to the ground and breaking a bone in his back.

The company had failed to make sure that work at both locations was carried out safely, putting employees at serious risk. At the castle, the company also failed to ensure the work was properly supervised, while at the power station it had failed to make a proper assessment of the risks and to properly manage and monitor the work. Central pleaded guilty to one charge in relation to the death of Collins and another in relation to the incident at Nottingham Castle. The company was fined £100,000 plus £32,000 costs.

HSE inspector Martin Giles said: "The work at the power station required careful planning and assessment of the risks involved. Tragically, the company failed to make sure the rigging of the ropes was done safely and the result was the needless death of an employee.

£16,000 for scissor lift overload

Clark & Fenn Skanska Ltd of Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, has been hit for £16,000 in fines and costs after it pleaded guilty to breaching the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 and failing to ensure the lifting of materials was properly planned, supervised and carried out in a safe manner.

Two men - a 22 year old who suffered a fractured pelvis and cheekbone, broken nose and heavy bruising and a 39 year old colleague who fractured his skull, eye socket, elbow and thumb - were using a scissor platform to lift plasterboard sheets when they fell around seven metres after the lift overturned on 16th August 2007.

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found the men were using the wrong type of equipment to transport the plasterboard. Inspector Kevin Wilson said: "This was a serious incident where the consequences could have been much worse. The platform was only half a metre away from a further drop of nearly six metres.

"The incident could have been prevented with appropriate planning and selection of equipment suitable for the task. Mobile elevating work platforms are not designed for use as material hoists. They are designed as a working platform for positioning operatives and their tools. In this case, the platform was heavily overloaded. MEWPs should also only be operated by competent, trained operatives familiar with the safety requirements and devices for the type of platform used. In this case the operative had been trained to use MEWPs but had relatively little experience and had not received familiarisation training for the type of platform being used."



C&a training

Ladder fall costs more than £14,000

JDS Trucks Ltd, which sells and repairs heavy goods vehicles, was fined £9,900 plus £4,613 in costs following an incident at its garage in Blackburn in December 2009. A 47 year old man fractured his hip and left elbow after he fell three metres while trying to step onto a ladder from the top of a truck cab. He needed four months off work to recover.

The court heard that he had climbed onto the truck roof to assess whether a wind deflector needed to be fitted. But the ladder had not been secured and no one else was there to help him. JDS Trucks pleaded guilty to two breaches of the Work at Height Regulations 2005 and one breach of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations.

HSE Inspector Shellie Bee, said: "JDS Trucks simply didn't think about the risks the worker might face if he climbed onto the roof of the cab using a ladder, and put his life in danger as a result. He was off work for several months as a result of his injuries. Since the incident, the company has upgraded its gantry for safe working at height and implemented a safe system of work for fitting wind deflectors. Ladders do have a use in the workplace and in some situations are appropriate with the correct training and if they're properly secured. In this case no training had been given and no safe system of work existed to complete the job safely."



Who trained him then?

In a small town in France five men try and place a large fridge in an upstairs apartment. Working at height and manual handling rules were clearly not factored in this method.