



Surveyor falls from height

Briefing

Introduction

This briefing note reminds all those involved in surveying and inspection work of the need to carefully plan and risk assess work at height. It is also relevant to property managers in control of roof maintenance work. It follows a serious accident where an asbestos surveyor fell from a height while working on a roof.

Issue

A Glasgow property company was prosecuted by the HSE and subsequently fined following an incident where an asbestos surveyor fell through a rooflight while in the process of taking samples.

Incident

Two asbestos surveyors were completing a survey in relation to a community centre in Glasgow. One accessed an upper roof level using an extended ladder. After taking samples he informed his colleague he was coming back down. He fell backwards through a rooflight, falling 8m and was found lying on the floor below. He was taken to hospital with multiple skull, spine and rib fractures and now uses a wheelchair.

HSE Investigation

The HSE investigation found that the work had not been adequately planned or risk assessed and there were inadequate precautions in place.

The key findings were:

- The company did not effectively plan, organise or supervise the work.
- There was no safe system for working at height on the roof areas of the community centre.
- There was no specific risk assessment in place. A general risk assessment stated that work at height 'must be avoided' or carried out 'in a safe way'.
- The injured person was not aware of the risk assessment or company safety rules.

Outcome

City Property (Glasgow) LLP plead guilty and were fined £200,000.

The HSE stated that "falls from height are avoidable" and the "accident would have been prevented had the risks been properly assessed and the appropriate control measures implemented."



Comments and Actions

There are some specific lessons to be learned from this particular incident for everyone who carries out surveying and inspection work and also for those who manage buildings.

For people who carry out surveying, inspection or maintenance activities:

- The key lesson is the need to carry out site specific risk assessments before starting work to take account of specific hazards on site and not to rely solely on generic risk assessments. Alternatively, to be able to adapt existing risk assessments to include this information.
- Additions areas to address:
 - Plan work at height carefully, taking account of the environment and work activity.
 - Ensure people working at height have had suitable training and understand the risk controls.
 - Monitor people who carry out surveying and similar work and not assume that everything is in order and company procedures are being followed.

For people who manage buildings:

- The need to identify fragile surfaces on roof areas, such as skylights and non-loading bearing roof coverings, and ensure that where practical they are guarded or otherwise protected, particularly where people are likely to work close to them.

Further Information

HSE press release:

<https://press.hse.gov.uk/2022/12/22/company-fined-200000-after-employee-badly-injured-in-fall/>

HSE website - the link below gives access to the Work at Height webpages, including safe use of ladders and injury specific resources:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/index.htm>