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Chalcroft pays £340,000 for fatal 10m fall

Work at Height

A CONSTRUCTION firm has been fined £260,000 after a worker fell to his death when an unsecured handrail gave way.

FJ Chalcroft (Construction) of Kings Lynn, Norfolk, last month pleaded guilty to failing to ensure the health and safety of 22-year-old Daniel Askew, who died in November 2003.

The accident happened at the Belle Eau Industrial Park, Bilsthorpe, Nottinghamshire, where Chalcroft was principal contractor building a large cold store. Askew was employed by an electrical subcontractor.

Askew had paused from his work and was leaning on a handrail on the mezzanine areas of the store, talking to a colleague, when the rail gave way. He fell 10m to the ground and died a short time later in an air ambulance.

The rail was made up of a single scaffold mid rail and a steel top rail, which was to form part of the permanent edge protection. There was no toe board. An HSE investigation revealed the bolts were missing from one end of the rail, so it was effectively wedged in place.

Chalcroft had failed to introduce suitable health and safety arrangements at the site. A contractor had been altering handrails as part of its system of work but there were no procedures for checks or weekly inspections.

“The construction phase health and safety plan was woefully inadequate”, explained HSE inspector Cliff Seymour. “It was one of those generic documents that sat on a shelf rather than something that actually affected the management of contractors on the site.

“There were various unsafe acts identified during the course of the investigation, any one of which could have led to a fatality.”

As well as missing edge protection, safeguards for roofers were inadequate and there were workplace transport failings.

Chalcroft pleaded guilty to breaching Sections 2 (1) and 3 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act but the case was subject to a Newton hearing to establish the facts because the firm denied causing Askew’s death.

Imposing a £260,000 fine with costs of £80,000, the judge at Nottingham Crown Court said that had Chalcroft applied its statutory duties, the risk would have been “materially reduced”. Recorder Burns said there had been serious omissions and a “shocking breach” of the requirement to provide edge protection.

Since the accident, Chalcroft has made “strenuous efforts” to overhaul its health and safety arrangements and this fact was acknowledged by the judge.