

# Skiing company fined after boy was killed at friend's birthday party

An indoor skiing company in Tamworth has been fined £100,000 following the death of a schoolboy.

Twelve-year-old Louis Watkiss had been at a tobogganing birthday party at the Snowdome in Tamworth on 24 September 2021. He was descending the main ski slope on a toboggan when it slid into the back of a member of staff who was conducting a slope walk. He fell backwards onto Louis who sadly died at the scene from head injuries.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Snowdome Limited failed to ensure the safety of its customers, including Louis, while they were undertaking tobogganing at the venue.



The indoor slope at Tamworth Snowdome

The HSE investigation also found that Snowdome Limited did not have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for tobogganing activities and had not fully considered all persons likely to be on the slope during tobogganing. As a result, there was no safe system of work, information, instruction, training or supervision to manage the risk of collisions between toboggans and pedestrians.

Nathan Cook, senior enforcement lawyer for HSE said: "Louis went to a friend's birthday party at the Snowdome and should have returned home safely to his family after an enjoyable occasion.

"Tragically, due to the failings of Snowdome Limited, this did not happen. Louis's death could have been prevented if the company had adequately assessed and controlled the risks associated with tobogganing activities.

"This should act as a reminder that venues and employers must ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments are in place and employees are provided with sufficient safe systems of work, information, instructions, training, and supervision.

- Employers are required by law to protect both their employees and others

from harm and assessing the risk is just one part of the overall process and [HSE guidance is available to explain what steps should be taken](#).



The indoor slope at Tamworth Snowdome

Nathan Cook continued: “Our risk assessment guidance may be more commonly used for workplaces such as factories and construction sites, but the same principles apply for busy venues like indoor ski slopes. The possible risks to people from equipment and the movement of visitors and staff needs to be thought through.

“Our thoughts remain with Louis’ family.”

Snowdome Limited, of Leisure Island, River Drive, Tamworth, Staffordshire, pleaded guilty at Telford Magistrates’ Court to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (‘the Act’). At a hearing on 26 February, they were fined £100,000 and ordered to pay costs of £14,534.

The HSE investigation into this incident was carried out by HM inspector Keeley Eves, with the support of visiting officer Natalka Heath.

#### **Further information:**

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives.
  2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
  3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.
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  5. HSE guidance about [managing and assessing risks](#) is available.
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# CCTV captures moment welder crushed at Sunderland shipyard

CCTV has captured the moment a welder was crushed while working at a shipyard in Sunderland.

David Vinsome sustained multiple rib fractures as well as internal injuries, including an abdominal wall burst, following the incident at Pallion Shipyard on 18 October 2022.

The 37-year-old from North Shields was crushed between an excavation bucket and a fabrication table. Following an investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Midland Steel Traders Ltd has been fined £100,000.

At the time of the incident, welders had been using an overhead gantry crane and a fork lift truck in tandem to rotate a large excavator bucket. David Vinsome was crushed as he attempted to attach the chains from the overhead crane to the bucket, and a fork lift truck started the lifting operation, unaware of his position behind it.

In a victim personal statement, the father-of-one, recalls how he spent nine days in hospital, before returning home.

"When I did come home, I was in bed for about a month before I tried to get down the stairs," he said.

"My partner is a NHS nurse, so she helped a lot.

"I am still suffering a lot of pain with my shoulder. I have a daughter and I cannot do the school run anymore or take her out for meals or ice cream.

"I am worried about getting back to work. I don't know when that will be or how I will manage.

"I don't think I will go back to welding."

The investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found Midland Steel Traders Ltd had failed to ensure that the lifting activity was properly planned by a competent person, or carried out in a safe manner. They also failed to produce a lifting plan, and to establish a safe system of work for this activity – leading to a breakdown of communication between the multiple operators involved.

HSE inspector Matthew Dundas said: "Lifting operations can often put people at great risk, as well as incurring great costs when they go wrong.

"It is therefore important to properly resource, plan and organise lifting operations so they are carried out in a safe manner.

“Had that been done in this case then Mr Vinsome wouldn’t have been so seriously injured.

“HSE provides detailed [guidance on lifting operations](#) including the importance on how they should be properly resourced, planned and organised, to enable them to be carried out in a safe manner.”

Midland Steel Traders Ltd, Portobello Ind Est, Shadon Way, Chester le Street, pleaded guilty to breaching the Sections 2(1) and 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £100,000 and told to pay £4,916 costs at Newcastle Magistrates Court on 13 February 2025.

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## Wood company fined more than £1million after two workers injured

A multi-national company that manufactures wood-based products has been fined more than £1 million after two workers were injured in separate incidents.

West Fraser (Europe) Ltd, formerly known as Norbord pleaded guilty to several health and safety breaches related to two incidents that took place at its plant in Cowie within six months of each other in 2020.

In the first Sean Gallagher, 29, a utility operator, suffered serious injuries after his leg became entangled in moving parts at the bottom of a storage bunker in January 2020.

In July of the same year, David McMillan, 39, a scaffolder, plunged more than 13 feet to the ground after a rusty plate gave way on a rooftop gantry.

Both incidents led to investigations by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The same company had been fined more than £2million in 2022 after another employee died after suffering serious burns at the same plant.

Stirling Sheriff Court heard that Mr Gallagher had been employed by the firm for a period of five years, spending the last two of which working at its biomass plant. On 20 January, he noticed a fault on a bunker at the plant. He initially entered the bunker to carry out an inspection, and did so in accordance with the company's safe system of work procedure.

However, when he identified further issues later into his shift, he entered the bunker again, but this time had not turned off the power. He became entangled in the machinery and had to use his own phone to alert a control room operator. He was eventually extracted from the machine and taken to hospital, with injuries including compound fractures to the tibia and fibula of his right leg.

As a result of the incident, the company installed a mesh guard across the bunker hatch, which is padlocked shut. It can only be unlocked by the supervisor once the system has been isolated.

The second incident happened on 21 July and resulted in David McMillan suffering multiple fractures to his body, including his neck and ankle. He had been working at height when a plate on the steel gantry gave way causing him to fall to the ground. He spent 20 days in hospital. The subsequent HSE investigation found there was no maintenance schedule or system of checks for the gantry structure. The steel flooring to the gantry was found to have been corroded in places, while some of the welds holding the plates in place were at the point of failure. Following the incident, the gantry was immediately placed out of bounds before it was dismantled and removed from the site.

In relation to the first incident, West Fraser (Europe) Ltd pleaded guilty to failing to comply with regulations 11(1) and (2) of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 and section 33(1)(c) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £28,000 at Stirling Sheriff Court on 17 February 2025.

For the second incident, West Fraser (Europe) Ltd pleaded guilty to failing to comply with sections 4(2) and 33(1)(a) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £1,040,000 at Stirling Sheriff Court on 17 February 2025.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Stuart Easson, said: "This is the second time in five years this company has been handed a large fine for failing to protect workers.

"Although both men sustained very serious injuries in these latest incidents, both are lucky to be alive.

"We hope this outcome demonstrates that repeated failures of this nature are not acceptable."

## Notes to Editors

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## Roofer given suspended sentence after man falls from scaffold

A self-employed roofer has received a suspended prison sentence after a man suffered serious injuries after falling from scaffold in Devon.

Daniel Hooper was given a 16-week custodial sentence, which will be suspended for a period of 12 months, following Iain Smith, 36, falling from a height of more than 25 feet while working for him, on 13 June 2023.



Iain Smith fell more than 25 feet from the scaffold

Father of three Mr Smith had been manually carrying old roof slates down a ladder attached to the scaffold platform at a domestic property in Honiton when he fell, suffering serious injury, including five broken vertebrae, as well as skull and rib fractures. Devon Air Ambulance took Mr Smith to Derriford Hospital where he was put into an induced coma for five days. He has since made a remarkable recovery but does still suffer from the effects of his injuries.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Daniel Hooper, 28, trading as Hooper Roofing, failed to ensure the health, safety and welfare of his employee as he did not undertake any planning or appropriately supervise the work at height or supply suitable equipment to do the task safely.

Falls from height remain a leading cause of workplace death and serious injury and [HSE has published guidance](#) about how these incidents can be avoided. It is vital that employers plan work at height on any size building or roof work project. Every employer should take suitable and sufficient measures to prevent any person falling a distance liable to cause personal



injury. While ladders can be used for accessing a scaffold platform, HSE guidance is clear that they should only be used for low risk and short duration tasks. Work equipment or other measures must be used to prevent falls where working at height cannot be avoided.



Daniel Hooper failed to ensure the safety of Iain Smith and was given a suspended prison sentence

The HSE investigation found that ladders were used to transfer heavy slate tiles to and from the scaffolding platform and this practice was not, so far as reasonably practicable, safe. There are alternative methods of transferring the slate tiles to and from a scaffolding platform that eliminate the need for ladders to be used for this task. These include the use of a pulley system or use of a mechanical conveyor.

Daniel Hooper, of Brook Road, Cullompton, Devon pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 4(1) of the Work at Height Regulations 2005. He was sentenced to 16 weeks imprisonment, suspended for 12 months and ordered to complete 150 hours of unpaid work in the community at Exeter Magistrates Court on 6 February 2025. He was also ordered to pay costs of £10,875.

HSE inspector Thomas Preston said "Falls from height account for around half of all deaths in the construction industry and Mr Smith is very fortunate to still be alive today.

"The risks of working at height and the control measures are well established, including the need to supervise the work appropriately. Alternative methods of moving materials up and down from a scaffold platform are available and must be considered when planning roofing projects."

This HSE prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Iain Jordan and paralegal officer Helen Jacob.

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