

Construction company fined after 24-year-old father falls through unprotected stairwell opening

- Father-of-one Joseph Tuck sustained serious spinal injuries that prevented him returning to a physical job.
- Simple measures to prevent a fall, including securing the stairwell cover or installing edge protection, were not in place.
- HSE identified multiple failures in the management of work at height.

A domestic house builder in Sowerby Bridge was fined after a labourer sustained serious spinal injuries when he fell one storey onto concrete through a stairwell opening.

It was only his second week on the job when Mr Joseph Tuck, 24, a father of one, stepped backwards and fell through an opening intended for a staircase that had not yet been installed. He was working as a temporary labourer for a scaffolding company in January 2024 at a site of four new domestic dwellings being constructed by Hillbeck Homes (Sowerby Bridge) Ltd.

The stairwell opening had not been securely covered (previous loose scaffold boards had been removed) and the open edges were not protected. There were no alternative means of accessing the sub-floor and West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue and the HART team had to rescue Mr. Tuck who had fallen unconscious. He sustained serious spinal injuries which prevented him from working for months after the incident and has not returned to a physical job since.



The uncovered opening

An HSE investigation found that Hillbeck Homes (Sowerby Bridge) Ltd had failed to put adequate measures in place to prevent falls from height, resulting in Mr Tuck falling through an unprotected stairwell opening and

suffering life-changing injuries.

HSE guidance states that employers must take suitable and sufficient measures to prevent and mitigate falls when working at height. This includes properly planning the work, carrying out task-specific risk assessments, and putting in place physical safeguards such as scaffolding, guardrails or coverings to prevent falls, including where there is a risk of falling through openings in floors, roofs or other work platforms. Further guidance can be found here:

[Work at Height – HSE](#).

HSE Inspector Louise Redgrove said:

“Falls from height remain one of the leading causes of death in the construction industry, accounting for around a quarter of all fatal injuries to workers each year.

“This was a wholly avoidable incident caused by basic failures in planning and supervision. The stairwell opening was not adequately protected, and simple measures such as securing the scaffold boards or installing edge protection would have prevented Mr Tuck from falling and sustaining serious spinal injuries.

“This fine should serve as a clear reminder to the construction industry that both the courts and HSE take breaches of health and safety law extremely seriously.

“HSE will not hesitate to take enforcement action where employers fail to take the necessary steps to protect workers from harm.”

Hillbeck Homes (Sowerby Bridge) Ltd formerly of 1 Bretton Place, Otley Road, Guiseley, Leeds LS20 8FL was found guilty on three charges. They failed to properly plan and appropriately supervise work at height and to take suitable and sufficient measures to prevent a fall. The company was fined £300,000 and ordered to pay £9,284.05 in costs at Leeds Magistrates’ Court on 16 September 2026.

This HSE prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Matthew Reynolds and paralegal officer Henrietta Ruthven.

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](#) are available.
4. Relevant guidance can be found here [Introduction to working at height safely – HSE](#); [The Work at Height Regulations 2005](#)
5. HSE does not pass sentences, set guidelines or collect any fines imposed. Relevant sentencing guidelines must be followed unless the court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so. The sentencing guidelines for health and safety offences can

be found [here](#).