

# Staffordshire construction firm and director sentenced after worker seriously injured falling through stairwell

- Worker fell through unprotected stairwell opening during construction of an apartment block.
- HSE investigation found work at height was not properly planned or controlled.
- Company and director sentenced after allowing unsafe working practices.

A Staffordshire-based construction company and its director have been sentenced after a worker sustained serious injuries when he fell through a stairwell opening during the construction of an apartment block in Staffordshire.

The injured worker, who was 26 at the time of the incident, had been appointed by BHG (Stone) Limited, the principal contractor, as a labourer. On 5 December 2023, he was assisting with the installation of wall insulation on the first floor of the building.

To reach the top corner of the wall, the worker placed a ladder across the stairwell opening. While carrying out the task, he fell from the ladder through the opening to the ground below.

The fall resulted in serious injuries, including fractures to his skull and back.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that BHG (Stone) Limited failed to properly plan the work and did not put in place suitable measures to prevent or protect against a fall from height.

The investigation also found that company director Alistair Howells was working in close proximity to the injured worker and had allowed the work to be carried out in an unsafe manner.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 require work at height to be properly planned, appropriately supervised and carried out in a safe manner. [HSE guidance](#) highlights the importance of using suitable work equipment and implementing effective control measures to prevent falls.

BHG (Stone) Limited, of Michaelmas Barn, Aston Lane, Aston-by-Stone, Staffordshire, ST15 0BW, pleaded guilty to breaching Sections 2(1) and 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £16,000 and ordered to pay £4,000 in costs at Telford Magistrates Court on 1 April 2026.

Alistair Howells, 58, of Michaelmas Barn, Aston Lane, Aston-by-Stone,

Staffordshire, ST15 0BW, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 37 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. He was fined £2,000 and ordered to pay £1,386 in costs at Telford Magistrates Court on 1 April 2026.

**HSE Inspector Sara Andrews said:**

“This incident highlights the importance of undertaking a thorough assessment of the risks associated with all work at height activities and ensuring suitable control measures are in place.

“Had the work been properly planned and sequenced, and suitable work equipment provided, this incident would not have happened.”

This HSE prosecution was brought by enforcement lawyer Matthew Reynolds and paralegal officer Rebecca Withell.

**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.
4. Guidance on working at height can be found here: [Work at height – HSE](#)
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 in England can be found [here](#) and those for Scotland [here](#).

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## **[District Council fined £50,000 after worker seriously injured in lawnmower incident](#)**

– Bassetlaw District Council has been fined £50,000 after an employee was seriously injured when a ride-on lawnmower overturned

– HSE found the council had failed to carry out a suitable risk assessment

– The Judge found the council to be highly culpable, having fallen far short of expected industry standards

A Nottinghamshire district council has been fined £50,000 following a serious

incident in which a ride-on mower overturned at a churchyard, causing an employee to fall more than two metres onto a public road and footpath below.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigated the incident at St Peter & St Paul's Church in North Wheatley, Nottinghamshire, where an employee of Bassetlaw District Council was carrying out routine maintenance in the closed graveyard.



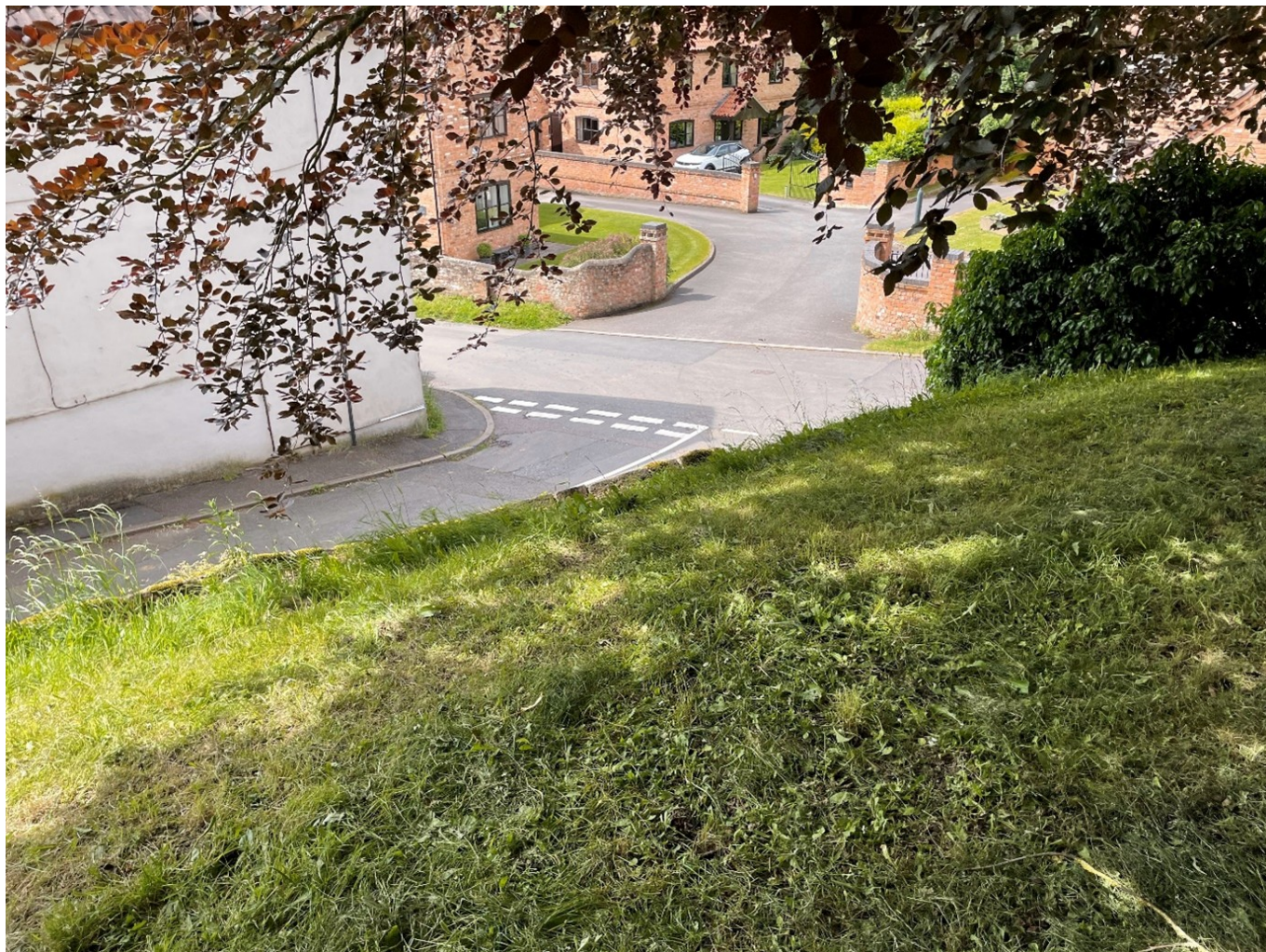
Photograph on the day of the incident showing the location of the ride on mower following the accident

While operating a ride-on mower, the employee lost control of the machine as it slid down a steep bank towards a retaining wall. Both the machine and the operative rolled over the wall, falling approximately 2.3 metres to the pavement and road below. The employee sustained injuries including cracked ribs.

The HSE investigation identified a series of significant failings by the council:

- Bassetlaw District Council had not carried out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks posed to employees by operating ride-on mowers on banks and slopes.

- The council had not provided adequate information, instruction or training to employees regarding the use of such machinery near slopes and banks.
- No measures were in place at the retaining wall to prevent a fall from height liable to cause personal injury.



Photograph taken from the Church Yard, set back from the slope, looking down onto the junction of Church Hill and Church Street

[A Guidance Document for the Landscape Industry](#) published by the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) sets out clearly the measures employers should take to assess and control risks when working on or near slopes and banks. The Judge found that Bassetlaw District Council had failed to meet these industry standards and was therefore highly culpable, having fallen far short of what was expected.

Bassetlaw District Council, of Queen's Buildings, Potter Street, Worksop, Nottinghamshire, S80 2AH, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) and Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The council was fined £50,000, ordered to pay £5,138.85 in costs and a victim surcharge of £2,000 at Nottingham Magistrates' Court on Monday 30 March 2026.



Church Hill

**HSE Inspector Muir Finlay said:** “This was a serious incident which could have been much worse.

“The fine imposed on the District Council should underline to all employers that work on banks and slopes should only be undertaken when a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks has been carried out and appropriate controls or training provided.

“HSE will not hesitate to take action against those that do not do all that they should to keep people safe and healthy at work.”

The HSE prosecution was brought by enforcement lawyer Andrew Siddall and paralegal officer Benjamin Stobbart.

### **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 & 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. Guidance can be found here: [A Guidance Document for the Landscape Industry](#)

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 in England can be found [here](#) and those for Scotland [here](#).
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## [HSE inspectors checking asbestos management](#)

- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) marks Global Asbestos Awareness Week (1–7 April), highlighting free guidance and training resources available to help dutyholders and trades comply with the law.
- HSE inspectors visiting premises and construction sites check that asbestos is being managed in compliance with the law and workers are kept safe.
- Regulator outlines three main areas businesses should look to improve.

To mark Global Asbestos Awareness Week (1–7 April), HSE is advising dutyholders to check they are compliant in areas that inspectors find need improving when visiting premises.

Building owners, landlords and tradespeople who fail to manage asbestos risks may face prosecution. The most common pitfalls found by inspectors are:

- asbestos management plans not in place to ensure the condition of asbestos-containing materials is routinely monitored
- information, instruction, and training provided for managing asbestos is inadequate
- procedures and arrangements to manage work liable to disturb known or presumed asbestos-containing materials need improving.

Nicholas James from HSE's engagement and policy division, said: "The law requires that asbestos in buildings is proactively managed and monitored. This means active monitoring – not a one-off check. The priorities are clear – accurate identification and assessment of asbestos-containing materials, robust procedures and arrangements for managing risk, ongoing active management and condition monitoring, effective communication and relevant training. Don't let poor management arrangements be the reason an inspector finds you failing."

HSE provides a host of free guidance and advice for dutyholders at [www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos](http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos).

HSE inspectors can visit premises without warning. Where management is found to be lacking, enforcement action is taken to require that appropriate asbestos risk management measures are put in place. Non-compliance can result

in prosecution, fines and criminal records.

The legal duty to manage asbestos applies to a wide range of non-domestic and multi-occupancy premises – from offices, factories and shops to schools, hospitals and places of worship. It applies to building owners, landlords and those responsible for maintenance and repair.

Four steps every dutyholder must take:

- Arrange an asbestos survey, or review any existing ones
- Create a register and assess the risk
- Write an asbestos management plan
- Put the plan into action and keep it under review

When managed properly and in good condition, the risk from asbestos is low. Ensuring those that need to take actions understand how to keep asbestos-containing materials in buildings safe is critical for complying with the law.

When removal, refurbishment, maintenance or repair work is required, it needs to be carried out safely and in accordance with regulations. Workers in construction and building trades are at particular risk of disturbing asbestos. These workers should receive asbestos awareness training to help ensure they do not carry out tasks that could disturb asbestos, and any materials that may contain asbestos must be properly identified before work begins through a suitably intrusive refurbishment or demolition survey. All work on asbestos-containing materials requires specific training. Carrying out work without the correct training and controls is illegal.

A recent prosecution shows the consequences of getting it wrong. A site manager received a suspended prison sentence, a five-year director disqualification and an electronically monitored curfew after failing to use a licensed contractor to clear asbestos from a demolition site. The two companies involved were fined a combined £88,300 and ordered to pay over £9,000 in costs and surcharges.

HSE Inspector, Rob Gidman, said: “Asbestos is a Class 1 carcinogen which is known to kill around 20 tradespeople each week due to past exposure. By failing to ensure the demolition was properly planned and managed, considering the presence of asbestos on site, these companies and the site manager put workers and members of the public at risk of being exposed to a substance known to cause fatal lung disease.

“This case should serve as a reminder to those engaged in demolition and refurbishment work that they have responsibilities when it comes to managing the risks associated with asbestos.”

### **Support is available**

- [Asbestos & You](#) – free practical guide for tradespeople
- [Asbestos: Your Duty](#) – guidance for building owners and landlords
- [Download the poster](#) as a quick reminder of what you need to do
- Find out what level of [training](#) your role requires at [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk)

## Further Information

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2. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) are available at [press.hse.gov.uk](http://press.hse.gov.uk).
3. Relevant guidance can be found at [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk): [Asbestos – HSE](#)
4. HSE's has two campaigns "[Asbestos and You](#)" and "[Asbestos Your Duty](#)" reminding tradespeople about the dangers of asbestos and the importance of working safely with it, also to reach those responsible for the maintenance and repair of non-domestic buildings.
5. Global Asbestos Awareness Week runs from 1 to 7 April 2026.
6. 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 relevant sentencing councils provides guidelines for health and safety offences for [England](#) and [Scotland](#) on their websites.

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## [Rotherham metal fabrication company sentenced after young apprentice injured during apprenticeship training](#)

- 17-year-old apprentice injured by a metal cutting guillotine
- An HSE investigation found a large gap in the bed of the guillotine that allowed access to dangerous parts of the machinery
- The company had failed to identify risk even after the incident had taken place

A Rotherham-based metal fabrication company has been sentenced after pleading guilty to health and safety failings that led to a young apprentice being injured by dangerous parts of a metal cutting guillotine during training.

On Friday 8 November 2024, a 17-year-old apprentice at MTL Advanced Ltd was cutting sheet metal in preparation for welding practice as part of their apprenticeship training. The guillotine was located within a dedicated Apprentice Training Workshop, where first-year apprentices learn and practise metal fabrication techniques before moving into the company's main manufacturing areas in their second and third years.

The apprentice made several successful cuts, but on the final cut their thumb came into contact with the machine's clamps, causing a crush injury.

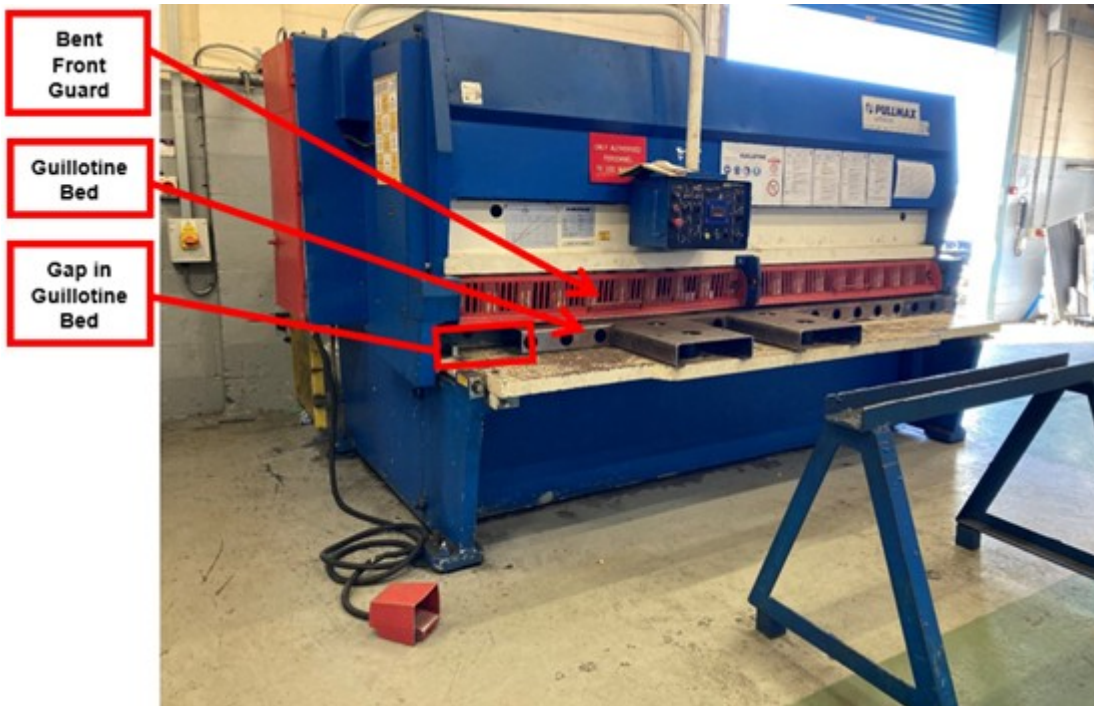


Image from site

The HSE launched an investigation and identified, from documents provided by the company before an on-site visit, that a large gap in the bed of the guillotine was allowing access to dangerous parts of the machinery. Critically, the company had failed to identify this risk even after the incident had taken place.

A Prohibition Notice was served remotely by HSE to control the ongoing risk. Following its service, HSE Inspectors attended the site and identified further issues with the guillotine requiring immediate remedy.

HSE provides extensive guidance on [managing risks in the workplace](#), including preventing access to dangerous parts of machinery and [employing young persons in training](#). Guidance notes that young people are likely to be new to the workplace and so are at more risk of injury in the first six months of a job, as they may be less aware of risks.

A wider inspection of the Apprentice Training Workshop revealed additional health and safety failings, including access to live electrical parts, further instances of unguarded dangerous machinery, and deficiencies in the system of inspection for workshop equipment.

MTL Advanced Ltd, of Britannia House, Junction Street, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 2RB, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 11(1) of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998. The company was fined £140,000 and ordered to pay full costs of £5,013, with a Victim Surcharge of £2,000, at Sheffield Magistrates' Court.

**Speaking after the hearing, HM Principal Inspector of Health and Safety Chris Tilley said:** "Young people and apprentices are at the beginning of their career and so when it comes to workplace risks, employers must take particular care to assess those risks and fulfil their duty to keep them safe. Had this machinery been effectively guarded, this injury would never

have happened.”

HSE provides extensive guidance on managing workplace risks, including preventing access to dangerous parts of machinery and employing young people in training:

This prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Chloe Ward and Paralegal Officer Hannah Snelling.

### 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.
4. Relevant guidance can be found here [Managing risks and risk assessment at work: Overview – HSE](#)
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](#).

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## [Major builders merchant fined £2.2 million after worker killed in conveyor crush](#)

- Paul Coulson was crushed by a three-tonne pallet after another worker operated a conveyor not knowing he was inside
- Dangerous working practices had previously been captured on CCTV, but
- Company only made changes after Mr Coulson’s death.

One of the country’s largest building merchants has been fined more than £2 million after one of its workers was crushed to death by a pallet of timber that weighed around three tonnes.

Paul Coulson, 56, died after a colleague started a conveyor not realising Mr Coulson had climbed inside it – resulting in the fatal crush.



Mr Coulson was crushed by a pallet of timber that weighed around three tonnes

The incident happened on 22 May 2024 at Herringswell Sawmills, a site in Bury St Edmonds in Suffolk operated by Huws Gray Limited. Mr. Coulson, a labourer, had been tasked with removing plastic packaging from pallets of timber before they could be processed at the mill.

The 56-year had climbed within the framework of the conveyor to access some of the packaging. However, another operative, who could not see Mr Coulson from his location, started the conveyor. This resulted in the pack of timber moving forwards and colliding with him. The operative, who could see that the pack of timber was not moving along the conveyor as it should, reversed it before changing its direction. This resulted in the pack of timber moving forwards again – colliding with Mr Coulson for a second time. The crush injuries sustained were so significant that he died at the scene.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the company – which provides supplies to the building trade from hundreds of sites across Great Britain – had previously identified that employees were accessing the danger zone within the conveyor and placed signage asking employees not to do so. However, CCTV analysis revealed that between 14 April and 23 May 2024, operatives entered within the framework of the conveyor on 19 different occasions.



The company did places stickers on the conveyor before the incident happened

Although the company had placed stickers on the conveyor in a bid to tackle the working practice, no further action was taken to prevent access until after the tragedy.

The measures subsequently introduced to reduce the risk included guarding the conveyor to prevent access, changing the system of work so that the pallets were unwrapped before being placed on the conveyor, as well as more CCTV being installed to allow all angles to be seen by those operating it.

Although standards of health and safety are much improved over recent years, sawmilling remains a high-risk industry. HSE guidance clearly identifies the risks. [Health and safety in sawmilling – HSE](#).

Accidents can happen when people enter dangerous parts of the machinery to carry out adjustments, clear blockages, or replenish consumables. Companies need to prevent access to the reciprocating carriage and associated machinery during normal operation. This can be achieved by having in place:

- fixed-distance guarding on the sides of the machinery;
- close guarding designed to meet the necessary reach distances;
- a combination of these or other suitable measures.

Huws Gray Limited based in Llangefni, Anglesey, Wales, pleaded guilty to breaching the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 Section 2(1). The company was fined £2.2 million and ordered to pay full costs at Chelmsford Magistrates Court on the 26 March 2026.

**HSE inspector Joanne Williams said:**

“This was a staggering failure that has cost a man his life and robbed a family of their loved one, and the scale of the fine handed down reflects the gravity of this case.

“All companies, regardless of their size, must follow the hierarchy of control for guarding dangerous parts within work equipment.

“Our investigation revealed that in this case, Huws Gray Ltd chose to control a serious risk through instruction alone – instead of putting proper safeguarding measures in place

“This meant employees were able to access a danger area, with tragic consequences.

“Had Huws Gray Ltd taken robust action when they became aware of the problem, Paul Coulson would be alive today.

“Our thoughts will always remain with his family and friends for the loss they have suffered.”

The case was taken by HSE Lawyer Edward Parton supported by paralegal, Mariea Slater.

**Further information:**

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