

Roofing contractor fined after worker falls from a roof and dies

A North West roofing contractor has been fined after an employee fell from a roof ladder and died at the scene.

In May 2021, roof replacement work was being carried out on a domestic property in Burnley by Richard Thornton, trading as Vanguard Roofing. On the final day on site, an employee of Mr Thornton was climbing a triple extending access ladder on the roof, to reach scaffolding at eaves level, whilst carrying a pile of slate on their shoulder. They slipped and fell to the ground, sustaining fatal injuries.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the interlocking sections of the ladder they had been negotiating did not allow for three points of contact to be maintained, especially when a load was being carried: a single pole access ladder would have enabled this.

The employee had also been wearing loose fitting footwear, which had not allowed for a firm foothold on the ladder. There was no safe means of transporting materials to the roof, such as a gin wheel and bucket, which would have avoided the need for carrying loads via the ladder. Had these measures been taken, proper contact could have been maintained and the incident avoided. The investigation also found that Mr Thornton did not have any employer's liability insurance in place to protect workers.

At Blackpool Magistrates' Court Richard Anthony Thornton of Upper Brook Court, Greenbrook Road, Burnley pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 4(1) of The Work at Height Regulations 2005 and Section 1(1) of the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969. He was sentenced to six months in prison, suspended for two years, and ordered to pay costs of £3,600.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE Inspector Christine McGlynn said: "Each year falls from ladders kill a number of workers. This tragic incident could have been avoided by the selection of equipment which would have meant that three points of contact could be maintained.

"Inexpensive equipment, such as a gin wheel and bucket, could and should have been made available to avoid the need to carry materials up a ladder. Every employer needs to ensure that they have Employers Liability (Compulsory) Insurance in place to insure against liability for injury or disease to their employees arising out of their employment. Where employers are found to be in breach of this requirement, they will be held to account by HSE."

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury

and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. [hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)

2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [legislation.gov.uk/](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/)
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. More information and guidance can be found at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height>