

Two companies and an individual sentenced after worker crushed by two tonnes of soil in trench collapse

- Gheorghita Arsene, 33, died after being buried under around two tonnes of soil when the trench collapsed at a site in Banstead on 24 June 2020.
- A joint investigation found that the trench had no supports to prevent it from collapsing and soil had been piled right next to the edge.
- The collapse happened during work to replace a damaged pipe at the bottom of a deep excavation.

Two companies and a self-employed contracts manager have been sentenced after a worker was crushed to death when an unsupported trench collapsed at a site in Surrey.

Gheorghita Arsene, 33, who was known as Geo, was working at a site on Park Road, Banstead, Surrey on 24 June 2020. He had been working to replace a damaged pipe at the bottom of the deep trench, which had been dug with a three-tonne digger. He had been clearing soil with a shovel and a pickaxe when, without warning, the trench walls collapsed. Although rescue attempts were made, he was buried in approximately 2 tonnes of soil and sadly died at the scene.

A joint investigation by Surrey Police and the Health and Safety Executive over five years found there were no supports in the trench and excavated soil had been deposited immediately next to it. The investigation also found that, earlier that day, Anthony O'Connor a self-employed contracts manager working for T Vaughan Limited, had observed another worker in the same unsupported excavation earlier that day. Despite being aware of the measures required to prevent a trench collapse, he failed to ensure they were in place.

Earlier that day, O'Connor had observed another worker carrying out work in the same unsupported excavation. As an experienced contracts manager, he knew suitable measures were required to prevent a trench collapse but failed to ensure they were implemented.

Following a trial at the Old Bailey on 9 September 2026, principal contractor Appledorn Developments Limited and subcontractor T Vaughan Limited were convicted of breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

T Vaughan Limited was fined £650,000 and ordered to pay costs of £40,000.

Appledorn Developments Limited was fined £500,000.

Anthony O'Connor, a self-employed contracts manager working for T Vaughan Limited, pleaded guilty on 22 May 2026 to breaching Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 by failing to take reasonable care for the health and safety of others who may have been affected by his acts or

omissions at work.

He was sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to complete 150 hours of unpaid work.

A Health and Safety Executive spokesperson said:

"Gheorghita Arsene's death was as horrifying as it was preventable. He lost his life because basic precautions were not in place to protect workers from the well-known risks that come with excavation work. Anthony O'Connor had observed workers in the trench without adequate protection and was aware of the measures required to prevent a collapse.

"This case is a stark reminder that when basic safety standards are ignored, the consequences can be fatal. Companies and individuals alike have legal duties to protect workers and where they fail to do so, and we will not hesitate to take enforcement action.

"Our thoughts today are with Mr Arsene's loved ones, as they mourn their loss."

This prosecution was brought by the Crown Prosecution Service.

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. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.
3. 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](#).