

Waste management company fined after employee falls from height

- Worker broke leg after falling from compost screening machine while clearing blockage.
- HSE investigation found company failed to assess risks and provide safe system of work.
- Employees were able to bypass safety measures while cleaning machinery.

A green waste recycling company based in West Sussex has been fined after an employee broke his leg when he fell from a compost screening machine.

Simon Pateman was working for Woodhorn Group Limited at its green waste recycling site in Tangmere, Chichester, on 16 February 2024 when he climbed onto a Komtech compost screening machine to clear a blockage from the fan housing.

The machine was suspended at height within a large barn and lacked sufficient measures to prevent falls. As Mr Pateman climbed onto the machine he slipped, trapping his left leg between the machine and its frame.



Compost screening machine

The momentum and lack of guardrails around the fan housing caused Mr Pateman to fall backwards onto the gantry, striking his head on a handrail while his leg remained trapped. He sustained a broken leg which required surgery to insert a metal plate and screws.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Woodhorn Group Limited had failed to assess the risks associated with cleaning the machine, including the risk of falls from height from the unguarded edges around the fan housing.

The company's standard operating procedure also failed to provide employees with instructions on how to safely clean and unblock the fan housing. The investigation further found the company had failed to prevent access to dangerous parts of the machine, with the interlocked gate not preventing access to employees during the cleaning process for the 'stars' – rotating

discs used to break down larger clumps of compost

HSE guidance on [working at height](#) states that employers should carry out as much work as possible from the ground and ensure workers can safely access and leave areas where work at height is required. Equipment used for working at height must be suitable, stable and strong enough for the task and properly maintained.

Employers and those in control of work at height must ensure activities are properly planned, supervised and carried out by competent people, including the use of appropriate equipment.

Woodhorn Group Limited, of Woodhorn Business Centre, Woodhorn Lane, Oving, Chichester, West Sussex, PO20 2BX, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £14,000 and ordered to pay £6,500 in costs at Brighton Magistrates' Court on 16 March 2026.

HSE Inspector Stephanie Hickford-Smith said:

"This was an entirely preventable incident that has had a significant impact on Mr Pateman's mobility and quality of life.

"The measures implemented by Woodhorn Group after HSE's intervention, including new guarded working platforms around the fan housing and over the 'stars', demonstrate what was reasonably practicable and should have been in place all along."

This HSE prosecution was brought by enforcement lawyer Gemma Zakrzewski 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. 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](#).