

Wood company fined more than £1million after two workers injured

A multi-national company that manufactures wood-based products has been fined more than £1 million after two workers were injured in separate incidents.

West Fraser (Europe) Ltd, formerly known as Norbord pleaded guilty to several health and safety breaches related to two incidents that took place at its plant in Cowie within six months of each other in 2020.

In the first Sean Gallagher, 29, a utility operator, suffered serious injuries after his leg became entangled in moving parts at the bottom of a storage bunker in January 2020.

In July of the same year, David McMillan, 39, a scaffolder, plunged more than 13 feet to the ground after a rusty plate gave way on a rooftop gantry.

Both incidents led to investigations by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The same company had been fined more than £2million in 2022 after another employee died after suffering serious burns at the same plant.

Stirling Sheriff Court heard that Mr Gallagher had been employed by the firm for a period of five years, spending the last two of which working at its biomass plant. On 20 January, he noticed a fault on a bunker at the plant.

He initially entered the bunker to carry out an inspection, and did so in accordance with the company's safe system of work procedure.

However, when he identified further issues later into his shift, he entered the bunker again, but this time had not turned off the power. He became entangled in the machinery and had to use his own phone to alert a control room operator. He was eventually extracted from the machine and taken to hospital, with injuries including compound fractures to the tibia and fibula of his right leg.

As a result of the incident, the company installed a mesh guard across the bunker hatch, which is padlocked shut. It can only be unlocked by the supervisor once the system has been isolated.

The second incident happened on 21 July and resulted in David McMillan suffering multiple fractures to his body, including his neck and ankle. He had been working at height when a plate on the steel gantry gave way causing him to fall to the ground. He spent 20 days in hospital. The subsequent HSE investigation found there was no maintenance schedule or system of checks for the gantry structure. The steel flooring to the gantry was found to have been corroded in places, while some of the welds holding the plates in place were at the point of failure. Following the incident, the gantry was immediately placed out of bounds before it was dismantled and removed from the site.

In relation to the first incident, West Fraser (Europe) Ltd pleaded guilty to failing to comply with regulations 11(1) and (2) of the Provision and Use of

Work Equipment Regulations 1998 and section 33(1)(c) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £28,000 at Stirling Sheriff Court on 17 February 2025.

For the second incident, West Fraser (Europe) Ltd pleaded guilty to failing to comply with sections 4(2) and 33(1)(a) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £1,040,000 at Stirling Sheriff Court on 17 February 2025.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Stuart Easson, said: "This is the second time in five years this company has been handed a large fine for failing to protect workers.

"Although both men sustained very serious injuries in these latest incidents, both are lucky to be alive.

"We hope this outcome demonstrates that repeated failures of this nature are not acceptable."

Notes to Editors

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. 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](#).