



Sentences after tree-felling incident leaves worker in wheelchair

The following report has been transposed directly from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) web site.

As school operator and a cleaning contractor have both been fined, after a man sustained permanent spinal injuries while felling a tree on school grounds in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.

The 59 year old from Gerrard's Cross, was using a chainsaw to fell a mature sycamore tree at Bassetsbury Manor on 22nd April 2013. He was helping one of the defendants, Paulo Mule, of P & X Complete Cleaning Services, to clear the site to make way for building work. Aylesbury Crown Court heard today (5th June 2015) a large partially cut branch swung down and hit the ladder the worker was standing on, throwing him to the ground where he landed on his back, sustaining permanent spinal injuries.

He is now unable to walk and will be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

An investigation by the HSE found Alpha Schools Ltd failed to engage competent contractors to undertake the arboricultural work.

The investigation also found that Mr Mule failed to undertake a risk assessment for the work. There was no safe system of work in place, with no ropes being used and the ladder was not secured. The work was not adequately segregated and there were members of the public nearby.

Alpha Schools Ltd, of London Road, High Wycombe was fined £35,000 and ordered to pay £25,000 costs after pleading guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. It also agreed to pay an ex gratia payment of £50,000 to the injured worker.

Paulo Mule, 33, trading as P & X Complete Cleaning Services, of Pinions Road, High Wycombe, was given an 18 months prison sentence suspended for two years and ordered to pay £2000 costs after pleading guilty to breaching Regulation 3(1) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

After the case, HSE Principal Inspector Karl Howes said "Arboriculture work remains high risk, particularly work at height in trees. Such work must only be undertaken by competent and trained contractors. All businesses have a duty to ensure they engage competent contractors when carrying out tree work."

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