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By Martyn Fisher

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Veg firm fined after worker's horror fall

Mann Potatoes employee of more than 50 years broke shoulder blade and sustained serious head injury after high tumble



Potato firm fined

A potato firm has been fined almost £4,000 after a worker was seriously injured in a fall from height during a dangerous lifting operation.

The 67 year-old from Woodbridge, Suffolk, broke a shoulder blade, fractured seven ribs, chipped two vertebrae, cracked his pelvic cradle and sustained a serious head injury in the incident at Mann Potatoes Partnership on 5 November 2012.

The man, who does not want to be named, was hospitalised for nine days after being admitted with critical injuries, and was unable to work for four months before eventually making a recovery.

On 21 January, Richard Mann, Alexis Mann and Christopher Mann, of Stangrove Hall Farm and Hill Farm in Alderton, Woodbridge, were prosecuted

for their roles in the partnership after an investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) identified clear safety failings.

Ipswich Magistrates' Court heard that the injured worker had been employed by the Mann family for more than half a century.

On the day of the incident he and a colleague had been asked to retrieve seed potatoes from a shed at Stangrove Hall Farm. To do this he stood in a potato box balanced on the forks of a forklift truck, which was lifted to the top of a stack of boxes some six metres high.

As he was being lowered back down he shouted to his colleague, who was operating the forklift, to stop while he freed a curtain that protected the seeds as they dried.

The box he was stood in became unbalanced when the forks re-started,

sending him crashing three metres to the ground below. His colleague backed the forklift truck away and ran to find him lying prone and unconscious on the ground.

HSE identified concerns with how the system of work designed for this activity had been implemented.

The court was told that although a safe and suitable system had been devised and appropriate training provided, no checks were carried out to ensure it was followed.

The investigation found that employees regularly bypassed the system when equipment was unavailable. For instance, a specific cage was available for use with the forklift truck to lift workers up to stack or retrieve potato seed boxes. However, when the cage wasn't immediately available, workers opted to use a potato box instead because the job

was likely to be completed before the cage could be located. It was a poor substitute, because it could not be secured well enough to make it safe.

Richard Mann, Alexis Mann and Christopher Mann were jointly fined a total of £3,000 and ordered to pay combined costs of £993 (including a victim surcharge) after individually pleading guilty to breaching

Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

Speaking after the hearing HSE inspector John Claxton, said: "The injured worker could easily have been killed. Lifting someone as they stand in a box on the forks of a forklift should clearly have been recognised as an unsafe practice, and the onus was on the business partners to prohibit such a system of work.

"This incident illustrates the need for duty holders to ensure work at height is carefully planned and managed at all times. That includes exercising vigilance to ensure the correct procedures are followed."