



A Leeds printing company habitually allowed its employees to be lifted to heights of almost six metres in an unsecured plastic box balanced on the forks of a forklift truck, a court heard.

Leeds magistrates heard on 30 November that no fall protection was provided for the workers during the lifting, which took place regularly during routine stock-taking at the firm's factory in Wortley. The risk of falling was magnified because there was no way to secure the box to the truck forks and no fixing points in the box to which a safety harness could be attached.

The HSE decided to prosecute the firm after HSE inspector Paul Newton was called out to investigate an incident that occurred on the firm's premises on 14 October 2011. One of First Class Post's employees had fallen from a plastic box on the forks of a forklift truck while carrying out work for another company. He was not injured, despite his fall.

During the inspector's investigation of the company's stock-taking practices, it came to light that First Class Post was undertaking its quarterly stock inspections in a "reckless" manner, regularly putting employees at risk of falling.

Inspector Newton stated that after he intervened, the company changed its procedures. Instead of working at height, stock-taking is now conducted from the ground, removing pallets from the racking. If needed, the firm uses airport-style steps – mobile steps with handrails and a small working platform at the top. The inspector added: "It was luck rather than good management that there had not been a serious injury at First Class Post as a result of this reckless working practice. I hope this prosecution will prevent one happening in future. Putting employees at risk in this way is simply not acceptable. If the company had complied with the law requiring work at height to be properly planned and carried out safely under supervision, it would not have had to face this charge."

The company pleaded guilty to breaching reg.4(1) of the Work at Height Regulations 2005 by failing to properly plan, supervise, and carry out work in a safe manner. It was fined £2500 and ordered to pay £1041 in full costs.

Source: SHP