



## HS Broadcast – Ladders and Stepladders

Anyone who comes into regular contact with me knows that I have an obsession as regards the safe use of ladders/stepladders, ensuring that a ladder/stepladder log is maintained, that the ladders are regularly inspected and that these inspections are documented.

There has been a recent case involving Volvo following a fall from a faulty ladder that resulted in the Company being fined £900,000.

In September 2015 a worker was servicing a large delivery truck for Volvo. This included the repair of a rope which was provided to assist drivers accessing the back of the lorry. The rope was about 3.5 metres from the ground and accessible from a stepladder. For unknown reasons the worker fell, striking his head and losing consciousness. He was in hospital for five weeks and has been unable to return to work since.

As is required under RIDDOR, Volvo reported the incident to the Health & Safety Executive. The Inspectors duly visited the premises and inspected the stepladder. They found that it had one anti-slip rubber foot missing and another which was worn. There were no witnesses to the accident, but the HSE speculated that the ladder had slipped and the worker had struck his head on the truck as he fell.

As you might expect, a national firm such as Volvo did have a system in place for regularly checking its ladders and stepladders; the problem was that the system was not being

adhered to. They had a ladder register but the ladders/stepladders had not been inspected for more than a year, despite the shortcoming being identified by auditors seven months prior to the accident. This was not the only problem with Volvo's ladder control system. The stepladder involved in the accident was not owned by Volvo and the company has been unable to establish how it arrived on site.

The untrained employee used equipment which he would have rejected due to its poor condition had he been properly instructed.

My advice therefore is;

1. Ensure that you have a ladder/stepladder register in place with each ladder clearly numbered and identifiable on the register.
2. Any employee should be able to identify whether a ladder or stepladder has received a formal inspection in the required time period; in this case once per year but I would recommend more regular inspections than this. The inspection frequency depends on the level of risk and is usually between quarterly and half yearly.
3. Staff should be instructed to reject equipment with evident defects and to place items in a quarantine area for repair or disposal.



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4. Training should be given to staff as to how to carry out pre-use inspections of ladders/stepladders.

As regards the case in question, Volvo pleaded guilty to breaching s.2(1)Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £900,000 plus £5,820 in costs. Volvo had acted promptly after the accident to make improvements and pleaded guilty to the charges against it.

However, the sentencing guidelines introduced in February 2016 take into account a company's turnover so that despite the company doing everything by the book after the accident, it still received a very large fine. Even non-fatal accidents can lead to very significant fines so it is not a good idea to cut corners.

Please bear in mind; it is relatively straightforward to buy replacement feet for ladders either from the manufacturer or a spare-parts specialist. For the sake of a few pounds there is simply no justification in taking the risk with defective equipment. In the event of you having any doubts about the condition of a ladder/stepladder please break it up (to prevent future use) and throw it away.