

School prosecuted after volunteer is paralysed

The National Film and Television School has been fined £17,500 and ordered to pay costs of £4,787, after a volunteer was left permanently paralysed having fallen 2.25 metres from a mock staircase on set.

The school, which provides education in film and TV production, was prosecuted for safety breaches that led to the 2008 incident at Beaconsfield Film Studios in Buckinghamshire.

HSE prosecuted the school for not having a safe system in place to prevent falls. High Wycombe magistrates heard that it was evident the school did not have adequate management arrangements for the effective planning and execution of the student film it was producing at the time.

Magistrates were told that the woman, who does not wish to be named, was working as a volunteer costume designer. She was attending to an actor's costume before filming, when she fell from an unguarded platform edge at the top of a staircase that formed part of the set.

She was critically injured, fracturing vertebrae in her back, and was diagnosed with permanent paralysis from the waist down. She has been left in chronic pain.

The HSE investigation found there was no edge protection at the top of the stairs. Actors, carpenters and other students were at risk of falling while carrying out assembly, decoration and lighting work from the staircase.

After the hearing, HSE Inspector Rauf Ahmed said: "A variety of methods can easily be used to prevent people or objects falling on theatre sets, depending on the visual appearance desired. It could be as simple as having edge protection at the end of a platform, or having wires attached to stunt performers.

"Of course, last minute creative changes can occur during filming which is why it is essential an existing safe system of work is in place."

The National Film and Television School pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and Regulation 5(1) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. The organisation was fined £17,500 and ordered to pay costs of £4,787.