

Taking it down safely: lessons from an event structure prosecution

What a 2026 HSE prosecution says about planning the dismantling of temporary structures, using the right lifting equipment and listening when workers raise concerns. Full report

Operational **Tactical** **Strategic**

Correct as of	20 October 2026
Applies to	Event structure, staging and production companies, production managers, site managers and crews
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Read this first. This report summarises a published HSE prosecution and the law and guidance behind it. It reports the court outcome as HSE published it and does not add findings of its own. It does not name the injured worker or the venue. It is general information, not legal advice.



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About this report. It expands OTAS Insight CI-002 with the case as HSE reported it, the legal duties, the lessons for each level, a dismantling checklist and a crew briefing. Section 9 lists what we could not confirm. To ask for this report in another format, use the contact details on the OTAS Insights page.

1 Summary

In July 2026 HSE announced the sentencing of an event structure company and its director after a worker suffered life-changing injuries while a temporary steel frame was being dismantled. A ratchet strap that was not designed for lifting or lowering was used to lower a steel beam of over 100kg. It failed and the beam fell on the worker [1].

This report sets out the case as HSE published it, the legal duties behind the charges, what HSE guidance and research say about dismantling and lifting, and the lessons in general terms for each level. It reports the court outcome only and adds no findings of its own. It does not name the injured worker or the venue.

It is general information for event professionals, correct as of 20 October 2026. It is not legal advice.

At a glance. What the case means for every get out.

- **Dismantling is construction work.** CDM 2015 covers taking down temporary event structures [10].
- **Write it down first.** Dismantling arrangements must be recorded in writing before the work begins [2].
- **Right equipment, right use.** Work equipment must only be used for operations it is suitable for [6].
- **Lowering is lifting.** Every lifting operation must be planned by a competent person, supervised and done safely [7].
- **Listen.** HSE says the director continued with the method after the worker raised concerns [1].
- **Personal liability.** The director was sentenced as well as the company [1][5].

2 The case

2.1 What HSE reported

HSE reports that on 26 June 2024 a worker for iSkate Limited, of St Ives, Cambridgeshire, was dismantling an internal steel beam temporary structure at a venue in Surrey [1]. During the dismantling, a ratchet strap was being used to lower a steel beam weighing over 100kg. The ratchet strap was not designed for lifting or lowering loads. It failed, and the beam fell on the worker, who suffered multiple fractures to the back, a punctured lung and a broken leg. HSE reports an 11-hour operation and three months in hospital [1].

The company's director was on site, made the decision to use the ratchet strap and instructed workers where to stand. HSE says he continued with the method even after the worker raised concerns about whether it was safe [1].

2.2 HSE's findings

HSE's investigation found that the company had failed to ensure that the dismantling of the internal steel frame was properly planned and carried out safely [1]. HSE pointed to its guidance that dismantling arrangements should be written down before the work begins, for example as a safety method statement identifying the sequence needed to prevent accidental collapse [1][9].

2.3 The court outcome

Defendant	Offence	Outcome
The company	Regulation 16(1) of CDM 2015, by virtue of regulation 20(1). Guilty plea	Fine £12,000, costs £6,949
The director	Section 37 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, by virtue of CDM 2015 regulations 16(1) and 20(1). Guilty plea	Community order, 75 hours of unpaid work

Table 1. Outcome at Guildford Magistrates' Court on 28 July 2026, as published by HSE [1].

The HSE inspector said that dismantling "is a high-hazard work activity, but if the work is properly planned it can be carried out safely", and that the accident "could easily have been prevented had the right work equipment been used" [1].

3 The legal duties

3.1 CDM 2015

Part 4 of CDM 2015 applies to construction sites, and a contractor carrying out construction work must comply with it so far as it affects the contractor, its workers or matters within its control [3]. Regulation 20 requires dismantling to be planned and carried out to prevent danger or, where that is not practicable, to reduce it as low as reasonably practicable, and the arrangements to be recorded in writing before the work begins [2]. Regulation 19 requires all practicable steps to stop a structure collapsing when it becomes unstable or temporarily weak during the work, and says temporary structures must only be used for the purposes for which they were designed [4].

HSE says CDM applies to construction projects in the entertainment industry, including building, fitting out and taking down temporary structures, and that the build and takedown can be treated as one project or as separate projects [10].

3.2 Work equipment

Under PUWER, employers must make sure work equipment is suitable for the purpose for which it is used, and that it is used only for operations, and under conditions, for which it is suitable [6].

3.3 Lifting operations

Under LOLER, a lifting operation means lifting or lowering a load. Every lifting operation involving lifting equipment must be properly planned by a competent person, appropriately supervised and carried out in a safe manner [7]. HSE guidance says lifting equipment, including accessories, must be of adequate strength for the proposed use, with an appropriate factor of safety, and that the plan should set out each step and the responsibilities of those involved, in proportion to the risk [8].

3.4 Directors

Where a company's offence is committed with the consent or connivance of a director or manager, or is attributable to their neglect, that person is also guilty and can be punished [5]. Courts in England and Wales sentence health and safety offences using the Sentencing Council's definitive guideline [13].



4 What HSE research says about the get out

HSE commissioned research on temporary demountable structures in the events industry before the London 2012 Games [11]. The report says "the deconstruction process is not simply a reversal of the construction process" [12]. It also says time pressures are inevitable in a fast moving sector, but sufficient time and resources must be allocated at every stage, otherwise unacceptable pressure may be placed on individuals and organisations [12].

The research is from 2011. The legal duties above apply now.

5 The lessons in general terms

5.1 Plan the get out, not just the build

The dismantling sequence of a temporary structure is a design and planning question. HSE guidance expects the arrangements in writing before the work begins [2][9].

5.2 Use lifting equipment for lifting

In this case the strap was not designed for lifting or lowering loads [1]. Where a load must be lowered, the operation needs lifting equipment of adequate strength and a plan [6][7][8].

5.3 Supervise lifts

LOLER requires lifting operations to be appropriately supervised [7]. Supervision should be proportionate to the risk and the experience of the people doing the lift [8].

5.4 Treat concerns as information

HSE reports that the worker raised concerns and the method continued [1]. Teams should consider making it normal for anyone to pause a job and for supervisors to review the method before carrying on.

5.5 Leadership is personal

The director was on site and chose the method [1]. Directors and senior managers can be prosecuted personally where an offence is attributable to their neglect [5].

6 What to do

Operational

- Use lifting equipment and accessories for lifting and lowering. Never use load straps or improvised kit [1][6].
- Know the dismantling sequence before you start [2][9].
- Keep clear of any load being lifted or lowered, and of anything that could fall.
- If you think a method is unsafe, say so and stop.

Tactical

- Write down the dismantling arrangements and sequence before the get out begins [2][9].
- Have every lift planned by a competent person and appropriately supervised [7][8].
- Check that lifting equipment suitable for the get out is on site, not just for the build [6][8].
- Brief the crew on the sequence, exclusion zones and who can stop the job.
- Treat a crew member's concern as a reason to stop and review the method.

Strategic

- Give the get out the same time, people and equipment as the build [12].
- Make sure CDM duties are understood and allocated for build and takedown [10].
- Back supervisors and crew who stop work to review a method.
- Understand that directors and managers can be prosecuted personally [5].

Action box

Level	Do this
Operational	Right kit for lifting and lowering, know the sequence, keep clear of loads, speak up.
Tactical	Written dismantling arrangements, planned and supervised lifts, kit checked, crew briefed, concerns acted on.
Strategic	Time and resources for the get out, CDM duties allocated, supervisors backed, personal liability understood.

7 Tools

7.1 Get out checklist

When	Check	Who
Planning	Dismantling arrangements and sequence written down	Tactical
Planning	Time and crew for the get out agreed with the client	Strategic
Planning	Lifts identified, planned by a competent person	Tactical
Before get out	Suitable lifting equipment and accessories on site and checked	Tactical
Before get out	Crew briefed on sequence, exclusion zones and stop rules	Tactical
During	Lifts supervised, people kept clear of loads	Operational
During	Any concern stops the job until the method is reviewed	Operational
After	Near misses and concerns recorded and reviewed	Strategic

Table 2. Get out checklist. Adapt it to your structure, your risk assessment and the advice you receive.



7.2 Crew briefing (about 1 minute)

"Tonight we take this structure down in this order: _____. Lifting and lowering is done only with _____, never with straps or anything else. The exclusion zone is _____. Nobody stands under or beside a load being moved. The person supervising lifts is _____. If you think anything is unsafe, say so and we stop. Nobody will be criticised for stopping the job. Any questions?"

8 Frequently asked questions

Does CDM 2015 apply to taking down event structures?

Yes. HSE says CDM applies to building, fitting out and taking down temporary structures for events and productions [10].

Do dismantling arrangements have to be written down?

Yes. The arrangements must be recorded in writing before the dismantling begins [2].

Can you use a ratchet strap to lower a load?

In this case HSE said the strap was not designed for lifting or lowering loads. Work equipment must only be used for operations it is suitable for [1][6].

Can a director be prosecuted personally?

Yes. Where a company's offence is committed with a director's consent or connivance, or is attributable to their neglect, the director is also guilty [5].

What happened in court?

The company was fined £12,000 with £6,949 costs, and the director received a community order with 75 hours of unpaid work [1].

9 What we don't know yet

- **Appeal.** We found no appeal on 20 October 2026.
- **The written arrangements.** HSE does not say what written plan, if any, existed for the dismantling.
- **Sentencing reasons.** HSE does not publish the court's reasons or the guideline category.
- **Northern Ireland.** CDM 2015, PUWER and LOLER apply in Great Britain. Northern Ireland has its own regulations and regulator. This report does not cover them.
- **Research date.** The HSE research on temporary structures dates from 2011 [12].

10 Sources

All web sources were opened and checked on 20 October 2026.

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12. Health and Safety Laboratory for HSE, 'Identification of safety good practice in the construction and deconstruction of temporary demountable structures' (7 December 2011). <https://www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/assets/docs/demountable-structures.pdf>
13. Sentencing Council, 'Health and safety offences, corporate manslaughter and food safety and hygiene offences' (definitive guideline page). <https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/sentencing-and-the-council/about-sentencing-guidelines/about-published-guidelines/health-and-safety-offences-corporate-manslaughter-and-food-safety-and-hygiene-offences/>

11 About this report

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