

# Firm fined after worker's lift shaft death

A company was ordered to pay £45,000 in a fine and costs at the Old Bailey today after a fitter was crushed to death in a lift accident.

Andrew Bates, 40, was working on a refurbishment of the lift at a surveyors' firm in Mayfair, central London, when he was killed.

The court heard Mr Bates screamed as he was caught between the top of the lift where he was working and the top of a fourth floor landing door after damage to a cable had caused the lift to shoot suddenly upwards.

Mr Bates, an experienced lift operative, was carrying out routine work on December 6 2005 for J Brown Services Ltd of West Kingsdown, Kent, when the accident happened.

The company admitted a charge under health and safety law.

Richard Tutt, prosecuting, said: "At 2.45pm a scream was heard coming from the lift shaft and Mr Bates was found trapped between the top of the lift car and the top of the landing door on the fourth floor."

Firefighters managed to release Mr Bates but he did not respond to treatment and was pronounced dead later that afternoon, the court heard.

Investigators discovered that he had been using a hand-held controller to operate the lift while carrying out routine installation work.

But a cable from the controller snagged on a bolt in the lift shaft causing it to break and two of the wires to short, leading to an "unexpected upward movement".

"This movement could not then be stopped from Mr Bates's position on the top of the car," said Mr Tutt.

Mr Bates may have been trying to escape from the top of the lift by the landing door when he was caught between them, the court heard.

Judge Richard Hone said it was more likely the accident could have been avoided if an emergency stop button had been on the lift controls and that what happened was "absolutely disastrous".

He added: "No financial penalty can equate with the value of a life."