

## Connect News Incidents 22/01/2014

### Dozens of crush injuries prompt call for safety

Businesses and workers must keep safety in the front of everyone's minds, WorkCover NSW stated, after research showed that almost four dozen people had received crush injuries while working with moving large machinery or heavy vehicles.

WorkCover analysis shows that in the 12 months from August 2012 to August 2013, there had been 46 incidents where people had received crush injuries while working near or in large machinery or heavy vehicles.

WorkCover NSW General Manager of Work Health and Safety Division John Watson said these figures show moving heavy machinery or heavy vehicles can be dangerous and can result in serious injury and even death.

"Last year a six-year-old boy was run over when his father was reversing a forklift truck at the rear of the workplace. The boy sustained serious crush injuries to his abdomen and underwent surgery in hospital," Mr Watson said.

"In another incident, a farmer fractured her leg and some ribs as a result of being struck by a front end loader's bucket that became detached while she and her husband were using the machine to hit a post into a post hole.

"A motor mechanic, working underneath a prime mover, sustained serious crush injuries to his abdomen when the truck he was working on came loose from its chocks and pinned him down.

In these examples everyone lived, however sadly that's not always the case.

Mr Watson said WorkCover staff can assist businesses to prevent workers from being injured while using plant and equipment.

"Almost every workplace has some form of plant or equipment and there are many associated hazards, including entanglement or crushing, cuts or punctures, being struck by moving objects, electrical or explosive hazards, slips, trips and falls, and manual handling," Mr Watson said.

“NSW businesses must provide information, training and supervision to workers and ensure plant and equipment is without risk to the health and safety of workers by ensuring it is installed correctly, operated by a competent person, not interfered with and that control measures are in place.

“We believe crush injuries and fatalities involving moving large machinery and heavy vehicles can be reduced if attention is paid to the control of the risks associated with working with and on such equipment.

“At WorkCover we recommend businesses follow three simple steps to ensure the safety of workers. These are: look for the things in your workplace that can cause harm; decide how serious the risks are; and eliminate or control those risks by making changes that protect your workers.

While court action is generally only used in the most significant safety breaches, Mr Watson said WorkCover can and does prosecute businesses that fail to adequately protect their workers.

“For example, last year two companies were fined a total of \$480,000 after two incidents four months apart left one man dead and another seriously injured.

In one of the incidents a labourer was being transported from one part of the large business to another via a tipper truck however when he got out of the heavy vehicle, he was run over as it drove away. The man died from serious crush injuries at the scene.

“Every fatality has an immeasurable effect on families, friends and communities and this incident highlights the need for businesses to have safe work systems in place to prevent death and injury,” Mr Watson said.

“There was a clear risk to health and safety, and in the absence of appropriate procedures, the risk was reasonably foreseeable.

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## Companies fined \$160,000 after man caught in conveyor

Two companies have received fines totalling \$160,000 after a worker suffered serious injuries when his arm became trapped in a conveyor at a fertiliser factory.

Incitec Pivot Limited and labour hire company Skilled Group Limited both pleaded guilty at the Geelong Magistrates' Court this week to failing to provide a safe workplace. Incitec Pivot was convicted and fined \$90,000 and Skilled Group was convicted and fined \$70,000.

The court heard that Skilled had sent its employee to Incitec's factory at North Shore, near Geelong, in June 2011. His job was to ensure that the conveyor belts carrying the fertiliser operated efficiently.

But after less than one month on the job, the worker was injured when attempting to clear a build-up of fertiliser from a moving overhead conveyor belt using a shovel. When the man's shovel got caught, his arm and shoulder were dragged into the conveyor, leaving him trapped and suspended for several minutes.

The court was told the worker suffered a serious and permanent injury to his left shoulder and was still recovering nine months after the incident.

A WorkSafe investigation found it was common for workers at the factory to chip fertiliser off moving conveyors with shovels, hammers and crowbars. The court heard that Incitec had relied on a "buddy system" to train the injured worker.

But one of the man's "buddies" also thought it was ok to chip fertiliser off a moving conveyor, and another had only worked there for two weeks.

In her sentencing, Magistrate Ann McGarvie said: "A buddy system only works if your buddy is telling you the right thing to do. Here, that didn't happen."

The court heard it was unnecessary for the workers to chip off the fertiliser since that was supposed to be done during production breaks with the conveyors turned off. But nobody told the workers that or supervised them properly.

The court heard that the labour hire company Skilled had failed to determine the nature of the work its employee would be doing at the factory and it had not checked that Incitec had properly trained him for the job.

WorkSafe's Regional Director, Adam Rogers, said employers had a legal obligation to provide a safe workplace.

“We hope this case serves as a wake-up call for employers, managers and supervisors to recognise their added responsibilities and make sure their risk assessment, training, and supervision practices reflect this,” he said.

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