
Halifax Recycling Company Director Sentenced After Worker Loses Leg in Machinery Accident

Description

In Halifax, a tragic workplace accident at BW Recycling Limited has led to a significant legal outcome. Daisy Ning Bai, the company's director, has been sentenced to a 12-month community order, requiring her to complete 160 hours of unpaid work. This sentence follows an incident where a young worker suffered severe injuries due to unsafe modifications made to workplace machinery. The accident occurred on November 26, 2019, at the company's Cinderhall Works site, resulting in the amputation of part of the worker's left leg and several toes from his right foot.

The Incident

Nathan Bland, then a 20-year-old employee, faced life-altering consequences when his legs were crushed inside a waste baler. This machine is designed to compress waste into manageable forms for recycling or disposal. On that fateful day, Bland was performing his regular duties when the lower part of his left leg was instantly amputated, and he also lost several toes from his right foot.

Reflecting on the harrowing experience, Bland, now 25, shared his ongoing struggles. "Every day is a battle," he revealed. "I can still have flashbacks. My stump often doesn't fit properly on my prosthetic leg, causing pain and frustration. The incident has not only affected my physical abilities but also my social life. I've had to rely on a support worker for daily activities such as shopping and attending appointments. The psychological impact is immense; I suffer from PTSD and depression."

The Investigation

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) conducted a thorough investigation into the incident. Their findings were alarming. Daisy Ning Bai had introduced a working platform in front of the baler to facilitate the filling of the hopper. This modification, while seemingly beneficial for operational efficiency, inadvertently allowed easy access to the dangerous moving parts of the baler, significantly increasing the risk of accidents.

The HSE report highlighted that the platform's installation was a critical oversight. It provided an unprotected path to the baling chamber, where the powerful, crushing components of the machine operated. Such accessibility without proper safety measures posed an extreme danger to workers, a fact tragically underscored by Bland's injury.

Legal Proceedings and Sentencing

Ning Bai pleaded guilty to breaching Section 37(1) of the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974. The court's decision underscored the severity of the breach. Alongside the community service, Bai was ordered to pay Â£5,843 in costs. Notably, BW Recycling Limited was not prosecuted as it had been

dissolved via compulsory strike-off on December 5, 2023.

HSE inspector Sarah Lee commented on the case, emphasizing its preventability. “A young man’s life has been irrevocably altered due to this incident. Companies must ensure they do not install working platforms or other devices in front of the hoppers on balers, as this permits access to dangerous moving parts. This tragedy could have been avoided with proper control measures and safe working practices.”

Wider Implications and Related Incidents

This case is a stark reminder of the critical importance of adhering to safety protocols, especially when dealing with hazardous machinery. The implications extend beyond BW Recycling Limited, serving as a cautionary tale for other companies in the industry.

In a related incident, Esken Renewables, a wood waste recycling company in Middlesbrough, faced a £160,000 fine for exposing workers to excessive wood dust. The HSE’s investigation revealed that the company failed to control the amount of wood dust in the workplace, putting employees at risk of serious health conditions, including nasal cancer and asthma. The processes involved in turning mixed wood waste into biofuel created an elevated risk due to the inhalation of both hardwood and softwood dust—known carcinogens and asthmagens, respectively.

Preventive Measures and Safety Recommendations

The HSE continues to advocate for stringent safety measures to prevent similar accidents. Companies are urged to conduct comprehensive risk assessments and implement effective control measures. This includes ensuring machinery modifications are thoroughly evaluated for potential hazards and that workers are adequately trained in safe operating procedures.

Regular maintenance and safety audits of equipment are essential. Any changes to machinery should be carefully documented, and safety features such as guards and emergency stop buttons must be regularly inspected and tested. Employers should foster a culture of safety where employees feel empowered to report hazards without fear of reprisal.

The case of BW Recycling Limited serves as a crucial lesson in the potentially dire consequences of neglecting workplace safety. By learning from these incidents, companies can better protect their employees and avoid the devastating outcomes experienced by Nathan Bland and his family.

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