
Tragic Machine Accident Claims Life: Firms Face Heavy Fines

Description

Two firms have been penalised after a father of three was killed by a machine. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation revealed that the incident could have been avoided. Russell Hartley, a self-employed engineer from Sheffield, would still be alive if the work had been properly planned, managed, and monitored.

Hartley was hired by Premier Engineering Projects Ltd to replace machinery at a recycling facility in Bow, London. He led a team of four engineers to replace a Trisomat screen, also known as a 'flip-flop', on 24 February 2020. This machine, which sorts waste of different sizes, was fixed within a metal structure at a height in a bay at the site.

A crane, supplied by M&M Mobile Crane Hire Ltd, was first used to lower the flip-flop from its position. Hartley then took over using a telehandler. As the flip-flop rested on the telehandler's forks, the machine began to move further down the bay. The flip-flop got stuck in the bay when Hartley tried to reverse the telehandler.

The crane was then used again to lift the flip-flop off the telehandler, which, unbeknown to the workers, had its forks slightly raised above ground level. As the crane moved towards the telehandler, the flip-flop toppled forwards off the forks and crushed Hartley. Another worker, who was standing on the flip-flop at the time, was thrown off the machine but escaped serious injury.

The HSE investigation found that two contractors, Premier Engineering Projects Ltd and M&M Mobile Crane Hire Ltd, failed to ensure the safety of those involved in replacing the Trisomat screen. The work was not properly planned, supervised or carried out safely, and the risk assessment was both unsuitable and insufficient. Hartley was working with nine other engineers, also hired by Premier Engineering Projects, as well as three workers from M&M Mobile Crane Hire Ltd at the site.

Hartley's wife, Debbie, said in her statement: "Russell was everything to us. He was funny and one of the nicest guys you could ever meet. Nothing was ever too much. If it needed doing, he got it done. He was a fantastic father and husband. He worshipped his grandkids and all his family.

"I feel like sometimes I am just waiting for him to come home. I can't accept that he has gone as I couldn't say goodbye. Nothing prepared me for that moment. I thought he would be here and live on forever.

"All he ever wanted was to keep his family happy and looked after and I will try to keep that dream alive."

Premier Engineering Projects Ltd, of Industry Road, Carlton, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £28,000 and ordered to pay £9,277.48 in costs at the Old Bailey on 1 August 2024.

M&M Mobile Crane Hire Ltd, of David Road, Colnbrook, Slough, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined Â£48,000 and ordered to pay Â£9,500 in costs at the Old Bailey on 1 August 2024.

HSE inspector Mark Slater, who investigated this incident alongside HSE inspector David Beaton, said: "Had this work been planned, managed and monitored to a sufficient standard, this incident was entirely avoidable and Mr Hartley's family would still have him in their lives. Risks arising from the lifting and moving of equipment of this size and nature are entirely foreseeable, and work of this nature should be afforded the utmost respect and care."•

This prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Kate Harney, who was supported by HSE enforcement lawyer James Towey and HSE paralegal officer David Shore.

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