
Newport City Council Fined Â£2 Million for Health and Safety Breach

Description

On December 14, 2023, Newport City Council was fined Â£2 million for breaching the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The case, which was heard at Cardiff Crown Court, involved the tragic death of Stephen Bell, a 57-year-old council worker, who was killed while carrying out road repair works. This article delves into the details of the case, the parties involved, and the implications of the court's decision.

The incident that led to the fine occurred on July 18, 2019, when Stephen Bell, a dedicated and hardworking council worker, was performing resurfacing repairs on Langstone Court Road, a section that runs beneath the M4 motorway. Bell was barrowing tarmac from the back of a Newport City Council tipper lorry when he was struck by a farm vehicle passing the road works. The impact was fatal, and Bell's sudden death left his family devastated.

Stephen Bell was described by his wife, Jenny, as a "kind, caring, and hardworking man who loved his family very much." Jenny Bell recounted the profound impact of her husband's death on their family, stating, "I do not have the words to express the pain my family and I felt when we heard the news. Losing him so suddenly has taken its toll on us all and has left us all heartbroken." She further added, "Stephen had a smile that lit up a room, an amazing sense of humour, and laughter that was contagious. In the years since he's been gone, my family and I have missed so much."

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) conducted a thorough investigation into the incident. The investigation revealed that Newport City Council had failed to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure a safe working environment. Specifically, the council did not establish a suitable and sufficient safety zone between the road works area and the running lane (the live part of the carriageway). Additionally, the perimeter of the road works site was not adequately secured to prevent road workers from entering the running lane.

During the court proceedings, it was highlighted that a Newport City Council team leader and four highway operatives were working on foot and were authorized to be on the site at the time of the incident. However, the lack of proper safety measures ultimately led to the tragic accident.

Cardiff Crown Court found Newport City Council guilty of breaching Section 2(1) and Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The court imposed a fine of Â£2 million on the council and ordered them to pay additional costs of Â£9,780. The court's decision underscored the importance of adhering to health and safety regulations to prevent such tragic incidents.

Jenny Bell expressed her gratitude to the HSE for their thorough investigation and support over the past four and a half years. She stated, "Nothing will bring my husband back, and no matter what justice takes place, it will never be enough to compensate my family and me for what we have all lost. I just want to make sure nothing like this ever happens again so that no other families experience what we have experienced."

The case of Stephen Bell serves as a poignant reminder of the critical importance of workplace safety. It highlights the need for organizations to prioritize the well-being of their employees and to implement stringent safety measures to prevent accidents. The substantial fine imposed on Newport City Council serves as a warning to other organizations about the severe consequences of neglecting health and safety regulations.

In conclusion, the tragic death of Stephen Bell and the subsequent fine imposed on Newport City Council underscore the vital importance of workplace safety. It is a stark reminder that organizations must take all necessary steps to protect their employees and prevent such devastating incidents from occurring in the future.

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