
Tragic Workplace Incident Leaves Electrician with Life-Altering Burns

Description

In March 2024, a company faced severe penalties following a harrowing workplace incident that left one of its employees with significant injuries. The worker, Carl Lowery, was severely burned while carrying out electrical work at a new apartment block development on Hulme Street, Salford. The incident occurred on 12 May 2020 when an electrical flash exploded, sending Carl flying backward and inflicting serious burns on his arms and face. This was not just another worksite mishap—this was a life-changing event for Carl, both physically and mentally.

At the time of the accident, Carl was 37 years old. He had already been through unimaginable personal hardship just three years prior when he tragically lost his son, Bradley, to a rare form of cancer. In memory of his son, Carl and his wife, Gemma, founded the Bradley Lowery Foundation, a charity that helps families raise money to access medical treatments and equipment for their children.

Now 41, Carl was employed by SRE Cabling and Jointing Limited, a company subcontracted by Aberla M&E Limited to perform cabling work on the new apartments. On that day in May 2020, Carl and a colleague were working on the building's main switchboard. Although the electrical components, including live bus bars, were meant to be shielded, a fatal oversight occurred. A guard panel intended to protect workers had a small gap—large enough for a nut to slip through.

That's exactly what happened.

A nut rolled behind the panel, came into contact with the live bus bars, and caused a violent electrical flash. The force of the explosion sent Carl flying, and the intense heat left him with severe burns.

The aftermath was catastrophic. Carl required multiple surgeries and even a skin graft from his thigh. His injuries left him unable to work and significantly impacted his quality of life. In his personal statement, Carl explained: "Even when Bradley was poorly, I worked. I've not been able to work since the accident, either mentally or physically. My left hand is my dominant hand and after the accident, I had no grip. I had to try and learn how to use my non-dominant hand."

But why did this happen?

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) revealed that the root cause of the incident was a series of failures by Aberla M&E Limited. The company had wrongly assumed that the guard panel offered sufficient protection, but they had not accounted for the gap that ultimately led to Carl's injuries. Additionally, Aberla M&E Limited failed to issue a permit to work (PTW) for the electrical tasks being performed near live components. This meant that the main switchboard remained live during the work—a major hazard that could have been avoided.

Further compounding the issue, there was a lack of oversight. The company's electrical site manager rarely visited the work area, meaning there was little to no monitoring of live works. This neglect increased the risk to workers like Carl, who were unknowingly exposed to life-threatening

conditions.

The HSE guidelines clearly state that employers must conduct a thorough risk assessment before any electrical work is undertaken. This assessment should identify who could be harmed, how the risk level has been determined, and what precautions are in place to control those risks. Unfortunately, in this case, these steps were either overlooked or poorly executed.

As a result of these failures, Aberla M&E Limited, based in Bolton, Greater Manchester, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. In March 2024, Manchester Magistrates' Court handed down a fine of Â£40,000 and ordered the company to pay Â£20,000 in legal costs. While the financial penalty serves as a reminder of the legal obligations companies must uphold, it is little consolation to Carl and his family, who continue to live with the consequences of that day.

Lisa Bailey, the HSE inspector involved in the case, commented on the avoidable nature of the incident: "This incident has had life-changing consequences for Carl and his family. It could have been avoided if the company had actively monitored and managed procedures, to identify risks and prevent incidents. Working with electricity is a high-risk activity, and safety must be a priority. Proper planning to ensure that risks are eliminated at the system design stage is essential."

This case underscores the importance of workplace safety, especially when dealing with high-risk activities such as electrical work. Employers must be vigilant in their duty of care to their employees, ensuring that all safety measures are in place, that risks are properly assessed, and that supervision is maintained. When these protocols are ignored, the consequences can be devastating.

Carl Lowery's story serves as a sobering reminder of the human cost of workplace negligence. It's not just about fines or legal consequences—it's about people's lives. Carl's injuries have left him unable to work, forced to adapt to a new way of living, and grappling with the mental scars of his experience.

Ultimately, the responsibility lies with employers to protect their workers. And while no one can turn back time and prevent Carl's accident, future tragedies can be avoided if companies take their health and safety obligations seriously. It's a lesson that should resonate across all industries.

CATEGORY

1. Greater Manchester

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