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# Tragedy on the North Sea: Veolia Fined Â£3 Million for Worker Death

## Description

### The Incident

In a sombre turn of events, Veolia has been handed a hefty fine of Â£3 million. This followed the tragic death of a worker and the serious injury of another during the decommissioning of a North Sea gas rig.

### The Workers Involved

Stephen Picken and Mark Kumar, employed by Veolia ES (UK) Limited, were demolition operatives known in the industry as “top men.” Their task was the dismantlement of offshore structures at an onshore facility in Great Yarmouth.

### The Fatal Day

On October 17, 2019, Picken and Kumar faced a perilous challenge. They were removing a massive piece of metal pipework, weighing over 27 tonnes, from a jacket structure designed to support oil and gas rig platforms. The piece of metal, suspended ominously, suddenly gave way. It struck the mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) they were in, sending them plummeting 12 meters to the ground. Picken died instantly, and Kumar was left with devastating, life-changing injuries.

### Investigation and Findings

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) launched an investigation into the incident. What they uncovered was alarming. There were significant failings in the planning and risk assessment processes. The risk assessment had not adequately covered the work they were doing. Additionally, there was a notable lack of proper supervision during the incident. The removal of the skirt pile was considered low risk, a grave misjudgment that cost a life and shattered another.

### Legal Consequences

In response to these findings, Veolia pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. On July 22, 2024, during a sentencing hearing at Ipswich Crown Court, the company was fined Â£3 million. They were also ordered to pay Â£60,000 in costs.

### Statements from the HSE

David King, an HSE inspector, commented on the severity of the incident. “This incident, in an emerging industry, highlights the level of controls required to safely demolish what are large, dangerous structures. Veolia did not meet these standards and tragically one life was lost, and another forever changed.” King emphasized the HSE’s commitment to protecting workers and ensuring that

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companies adhere to necessary safety standards. He made it clear that organizations failing to meet these standards will face serious consequences.

## The Broader Implications

The tragedy underscores the critical importance of stringent safety measures in high-risk industries. The loss of life and severe injury are stark reminders of what is at stake. This incident will likely prompt a reevaluation of safety protocols across the industry. Companies must ensure their risk assessments are comprehensive and that proper supervision is always maintained. The heavy fine serves as a warning to other companies about the severe repercussions of neglecting worker safety.

## Conclusion

The tragic events at Great Yarmouth have left a lasting impact on the industry. Veolia's substantial fine reflects the seriousness of the failings that led to the loss and suffering of its workers. It is a poignant reminder of the importance of rigorous safety standards and the need for continuous vigilance in protecting those who work in hazardous conditions.

## CATEGORY

1. Offshore

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1. Decommissioning Equipment
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5. Fines
6. Hazard Environment
7. Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
8. Incident
9. Leadership Accountability
10. Mark Kumar
11. Metal Pipework
12. MEWP
13. Offshore Structures
14. Risk Assessment
15. Stephen Picken
16. Work at Height Regulations (WAHR) 2005
17. Worker Safety
18. Working at Height
19. Workplace Inspections
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