

Aviation company fined after worker death at Heathrow Airport

An aviation company has been fined £160,000 after a man, described by his family as a “legend”, was crushed to death at London Heathrow Airport during the unloading of baggage containers from an aircraft.

The man was working for Dnata Limited, a provider of ground handling and cargo services to major airlines, at Terminal 3 on 23 February 2022. He had arrived at the stand with a set of trailers to collect baggage containers which were being unloaded from the hold of an Emirates Airbus A380 aircraft which had just arrived from Dubai.

The man moved around one of the trailers and under a type of scissor lift known as a high-loader; a raised platform being used to bring the containers to ground level. At this time the high-loader operator lowered one of its two hydraulically operated platforms, which was holding two further containers to be collected, and it crushed the employee.

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found that the operators’ visibility of the area underneath the rear of the platform was almost completely obscured.

However, Dnata did not have any engineering controls installed on its high-loaders, such as sensors, to detect if people were underneath raised platforms before they were lowered, or to stop movement of platforms in these circumstances. It also did not have any mandatory communication systems in place to ensure operators were informed that it was safe for them to lower platforms.

A spindle locking mechanism to secure containers on the baggage trailer being used by the employee was broken at the time of the incident, and it is thought that this prompted him to move to the other side of the trailer to attempt to operate it from that position. Although another employee had reported defects on the trailer more than two weeks before the incident and it should have been removed from service, the defects were not entered into the company’s maintenance system, and it was available for use on the night of the incident without having been repaired.

HSE has guidance on the safe use of lifting equipment. This sets out what businesses should do to comply with the [Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 \(LOLER\)](#).

The wife of the employee said: “My husband absolutely loved work. He called his work colleagues his second family. He used to be so excited to go into work. He used to love making tea for everyone during tea breaks and used to buy tea bags and take them into work especially for that reason.

“The future plans I had with my husband are ruined. After retirement, we were

both going to go on religious pilgrimages and also holidays together, go on experiences together, enjoy the time with our children together. Now I face the rest of my life without my best friend and companion.”

His children added: “He was the rock of our whole family. He was such a happy, positive, funny, loving, supportive dad. He had an infectious personality and was loved by many in his community. His presence is greatly missed at family gatherings and events. They are no longer the same. He was a legend.

“We can no longer go to an airport without being reminded that this was a place where our father died. Each of us has had to have counselling to help us to come to terms with and process what has happened, and we were each off work for a long period of time. However, it cannot heal the pain that we feel.”

Dnata Limited, of Dakota House, Poyle Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire pleaded guilty to breaches of Regulation 8(1) of the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 and Regulation 5(1) of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998. The company was fined £160,000 and ordered to pay £6,494.25 in costs at Westminster Magistrates’ Court on 17 April 2024.

HSE inspector Gordon Carson said: “Although Dnata had identified a risk of employees being crushed by the platforms of high-loaders, the measures it had put in place before this incident occurred failed to ensure that work in close proximity to these machines could be carried out safely. Numerous hazards exist during airport ground handling activities and companies providing these services should ensure their activities comply with UK health and safety legislation.”

This prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Rebecca Schwartz and supported by HSE paralegal officer Gabrielle O’Sullivan.

Notes to Editors:

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise.
2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.