

Cellulose film packaging company fined after workers exposed to harmful gas

- A Cumbria-based packaging manufacturer has been fined after workers were exposed to dangerous hydrogen sulphide gas.
- One employee subsequently died after collapsing in a pump room at the company's Wigton site in December 2021.
- The HSE investigation found failures to adequately assess and control the risk of gas build-up in site drainage systems.

A Cumbria-based producer of cellulose film packaging has been fined £200,000 after workers were exposed to harmful hydrogen sulphide gas.

On 24 December 2021, Futamura Chemical UK Ltd employee, Alexander Cole (known as Alec), was found collapsed in a pump room after exposure to gas at the company's factory premises in Wigton, Cumbria. Delivery driver, Robert Dyer, attempted to assist Mr Cole but was also overcome by the gas. Both men were rescued from the area and Mr Dyer quickly regained consciousness. Tragically, Mr Cole died in hospital the following day, which was Christmas Day. A subsequent inquest concluded that, on the balance of probabilities, hydrogen sulphide had contributed to Mr Cole's death.



The building with the pitched roof is the pump house, where Mr Cole was found.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Futamura Chemical (UK) Ltd failed to adequately risk assess its production process, as it did not identify that hydrogen sulphide gas, a by-product of the process, was able to enter the site's water effluent system.

The court heard that Futamura Chemical UK Ltd had conducted a risk assessment for the presence of hydrogen sulphide in the production area and implemented control measures. However, there was inadequate assessment and associated risk controls relating to the potential for hydrogen sulphide build-up in the site's drainage system. This meant there was a risk that the gas could be released from the drains, putting people at risk of exposure.

Hydrogen sulphide is a clear gas with the smell of rotten eggs and is known to be harmful to health. Depending on the concentration of the gas and the length of time exposed, symptoms can range from dizziness, loss of

consciousness and eye irritation through to death.

HSE guidance states that employers must adequately risk assess and implement sufficient controls to reduce a person's exposure to substances harmful to health to a level as low as is reasonably practicable. Further guidance on [Control of Substances Hazardous to Health \(COSHH\)](#) can be found on HSE's website.

Futamara Chemical UK Ltd, of Station Road, Wigton, Cumbria, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) and Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £200,000 and ordered to pay £20,000 in costs at Warrington Magistrates' Court on 6 January 2026.

After the hearing Inspector, Matthew Shepherd, said: "This tragic case shows the importance of conducting a thorough and robust risk assessment to ensure that all risks are properly identified and managed. Where companies use, or produce within their processes, substances harmful to health, it is vital that they have fully considered and controlled all pathways to exposure. Failure to do so can have terrible consequences."

This HSE prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer, Karen Park and paralegal officer, Benjamin Stobbart.

Notes to Editors

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives.
2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.
4. Relevant guidance can be found here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm>
5. HSE does not pass sentences, set guidelines or collect any fines imposed. Relevant sentencing guidelines must be followed unless the court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so. The sentencing guidelines for health and safety offences can be found [here](#).