

Farm fined after employee crushed during demolition project

Farming partnership, J & D Foster Farms LLP, has been fined following an incident on its farm where a 21-year-old employee was killed whilst dismantling a redundant piece of farming equipment.

Folkestone Magistrates' Court heard how, on 30 April 2019, an employee was crushed by a grain drying tunnel at Fishpond Farm in Tonbridge. The employee, George Murrell, sustained fatal injuries.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that J & D Foster Farms LLP did not ensure, so far as was reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of the two employees and that the system of work in place was intrinsically unsafe. The work involved dismantling the grain drying tunnel whilst working underneath it. The structure had heavy aggregate across the upper walkway.

The partners failed to ensure the structural integrity of the grain drying tunnel was not compromised during the dismantle, putting themselves and their employees at significant risk. This risk materialised when the structure concertinaed and fell, crushing George Murrell under the heavy aggregate and framework of the structure.

J & D Foster Farms LLP of Fishponds Farm, Upper Hayesden Lane, Tonbridge, Kent pleaded guilty to a breach of section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. They were fined £60,000 and ordered to pay costs of £6,731.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Joanne Williams said: "This incident has resulted in a young man losing his life in what was a wholly avoidable incident, caused by the failure of the company to identify their own competencies in what was basically demolition work. All too often those working in the agriculture industry take on tasks which they are not competent to do. As in this case, this work can and does result in serious and even fatal injuries.

"Every year many people are killed or seriously injured within agriculture. Those working in the agricultural sector need to ensure they consider their competency when undertaking unusual activities on farms such as dismantling and demolition. Agriculture accounts for one per cent of Britain's workforce, but 20 per cent of worker deaths, which is an extremely grim statistic.

"Abnormal work on the farm needs to be assessed as to whether the job is within the capability of the farm workers. For demolition work, as in this case, it will likely be safer and more efficient to contract out to professionals who understand the risks associated with demolition and dismantling and can properly plan and carry out the job using the correct equipment."

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. hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. For more information on safe practices involving demolition work visit: [Construction – Demolition – HSE](#)