

Paper making company sentenced after employee suffers finger amputations

Plymouth based West Design Products Ltd, who manufacture and edit craft paper for retail, including printing, punching and cutting, has been sentenced after a worker suffered serious injuries when her hand was caught in machinery.

Plymouth Magistrates' Court heard that on 14 September 2017, 22-year-old employee Charlotte Sargent was working on a paper punching machine at West Design Products Ltd in Plymouth. This is used to punch holes in card or paper so that they can be bound together. Paper is inserted into a slot underneath a Perspex guard and the punch operation is activated by pressing a foot pedal on the floor. Whilst adjusting the settings of the machine, Miss Sargent had placed her fingers between the die plates to tighten them in place, her foot inadvertently hit the unshrouded foot pedal. The die plates moved up, crushing her fingers between the plates and a metal bar. This led to the partial amputation of both her middle and index finger on her left hand.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the company fell significantly below the expected standard. The defendant failed to conduct its undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that Miss Sargent was not exposed to risks to her health or safety.

Neither Miss Sargent or her supervisor were suitably trained. They had not been shown the operating manual or the safe system of work for the Punch machine before the incident. There was no interlocking switch attached to the guard to prevent the use of the machine when the guard was removed. There was also no shroud supplied for the foot pedal, which can prevent accidental activation.

West Design Products Ltd of Bush Park, Plymouth pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, they have been fined £89,600 and ordered to pay costs of £5,584.28 plus a victim surcharge of £170.

Speaking after the hearing HSE inspector Hatti Shipp said: "Miss Sargent's injuries have been life changing. This incident was foreseeable and preventable.

"Employers should make sure they properly assess and apply effective control measures to minimise the risk from dangerous parts of machinery."

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