

Construction company fined over worker's serious injuries

Date:

10 November 2014

A Grimsby construction company has been fined for safety breaches and ordered to pay compensation, after a worker suffered serious leg injuries while installing piles for a new school science block.

Groundworker Jamie North, 49, from Grimsby, sustained multiple leg fractures during the pile cropping work at Caistor Grammar School, Lincolnshire, on 5 March 2013.

Mr North required two operations and had a steel frame and screws fixed on his leg. He also developed a blood clot which required further treatment after a 21-day stay in hospital. He was off work for a year and is still undergoing treatment on his ankle. He can no longer work in the construction industry.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) identified that Topcon Construction Ltd failed to ensure that work equipment used for cropping piles was used only in suitable conditions, and failed to dismantle a reinforced concrete pile in a manner to prevent danger.

Lincoln Magistrates' Court today (10 Nov) heard that Mr North was working on the construction of the new school building which required the installation of pre-cast concrete driven foundation piles.

The six-metre long piles were driven into the ground using a piling rig, in an upright position, until they were set. The excess part of the piles, which extends out of the ground, was then to be cropped using a hydraulic pile cropper.

HSE found the pile cropper hired by Topcon was only suitable for piles with a single, steel reinforcing bar running through the length of a pile. Another cropping machine, a power cropper, had been recommended for the school construction job by the hire company but the advice had been disregarded.

Magistrates were told the pile cropper being used was not powerful enough to cut through the

concrete and four steel bars so was used to nibble the concrete away to expose the steel bars, which were then cut through with a disc cutter. The piles were then pushed to the ground in an uncontrolled manner.

As Mr North was guiding the cropper over one pile, a colleague pushed another pile over but he had not cut through one of the bars. The pile twisted and fell onto Mr North.

Topcon Construction Ltd of Louth Road, Grimsby, was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay £1,980 in costs after pleading guilty to breaching regulation 4(3) of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, and regulation 29(1) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007. Topcon Construction Ltd must also pay Mr North compensation of £10,000 for his injuries.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Martin Waring said:

“Topcon Construction Ltd failed to heed two warnings that the pile cropper they had ordered was not suitable for the job, hence the need to adopt the high-risk ‘tree-felling’ method of pushing the piles over.

“They should have foreseen that the felling of piles, in an area that workers could wander into, presented a high risk of injury.

“Mr North suffered very serious leg injuries in an incident that could have been prevented, had the work been better planned and managed.”

There were 42 fatal injuries to workers - 14 of these to the self-employed – in the construction industry in 2013/14. For further information on working in the construction industry, go to

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction>^[1]

Notes to Editors

1. Regulation 4(3) of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 states:
“Every employer shall ensure that work equipment is used only for operations for which, and under conditions for which, it is suitable.”
2. Regulation 29(1) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 states:
“The demolition or dismantling of a structure, or part of a structure, shall be planned and carried out in such a manner as to prevent danger or, where it is not practicable to prevent it, to reduce danger to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.”

Press enquiries

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1. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction>
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