

# Private health care provider fined for exposing workers to chlorine gas

A private health care provider has been fined after three workers received treatment following exposure to chlorine gas.

Anthony Coombes, an engineer from Sandhurst, Berkshire, was working at The Hampshire Clinic on Basing Road in Basingstoke when he was exposed to the potentially deadly gas on 11 March 2021.

He had been hired by Circle Health Group, the firm that runs The Hampshire Clinic, and asked to reduce the PH levels in the clinic's hydrotherapy pool. However, there were no trained employees for the safe operation of pool plant at the clinic's physiotherapy suite and Mr Coombes had not been fully trained in chlorine dosing operations or chemical storage.

He added sodium hydrogen sulphate, also known as sodium bisulphate, to the pool's sodium hypochlorite tank which caused a reaction and resulted in the release of chlorine gas.



The sodium hypochlorite tank at The Hampshire

## Clinic

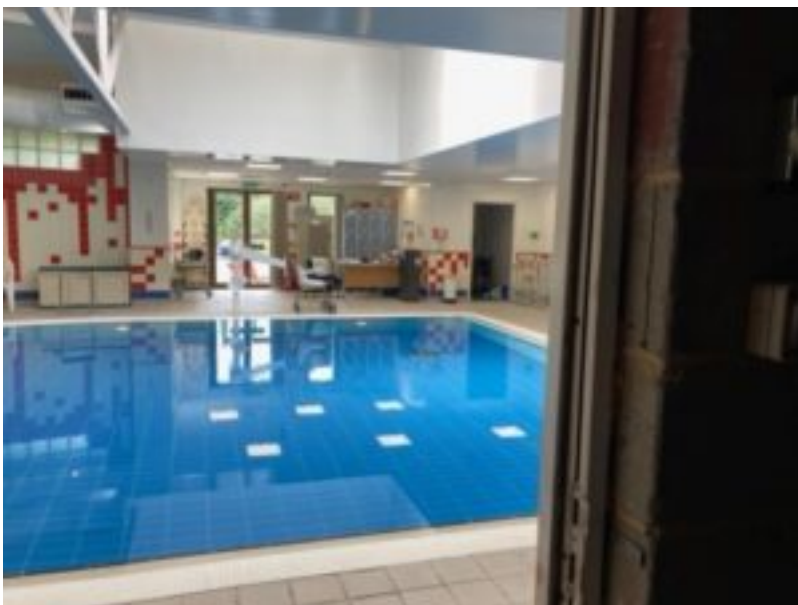
Mr Coombes was exposed to the gas and taken to hospital where he was given oxygen. Two other workers at The Hampshire Clinic were affected by the gas exposure and treated by doctors at the site.

Mr Coombes, 59, said in a statement: "I am just not the same person. I have lost my self-confidence, and don't want work alone anymore, I won't be a lone worker. My life nearly ended in two minutes, I now won't work in a plant room on my own and I have lost work because I won't work alone.

"My confidence is not what it used to be, I can't travel on my own and I used to travel a lot. It has affected my life, it has affected my mind. I get depressed and think about how short life can be, it just plays on my mind, so I have been keeping myself to myself. I've gone a bit quiet really, I lack motivation to do things, my life could have been over so quick."

Chlorine gas exposure can be fatal in minutes. Analysis by HSE's Science Division indicated that the maximum volume of chlorine gas produced was nearly 8000 times over the workplace exposure limit (WEL) and nearly 400 times over the Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) Limit.

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found that Circle Health Group fell far short in ensuring the health, safety and welfare of both its employees and contractors. Industry guidance for managing pool water treatment is well-known and been established for a significant period of time. Circle Health Group failed to put in place recognised industry standards of suitable risk assessments, adequate training as well as instructions and safe systems of work for the handling and mixing of chemicals.



The swimming pool at The Hampshire Clinic

HSE guidance can be found at: [Swimming pool management: Leisure activities \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/swimming-pool-management-leisure-activities/)

Circle Health Group Limited, of Cannon Street, London, pleaded guilty to

breaching Sections 2(1) and 3 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £160,000 and ordered to pay £12,520.03 in costs at Basingstoke Magistrates' Court on 20 June 2023.

HSE inspector Francesca Arnold said: "Swimming and therapy pool operators must comply with their general duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, which includes making a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of the health and safety risks to their workers and users including the risks of operating pool water treatment systems and the incompatible mixing of chemicals.

"Chlorine derivatives in pools are a well-established method of disinfectant provision and the accidental addition of acid to hypochlorite is the commonest cause of chlorine release incidents in pool buildings, it is fortunate that the injuries suffered were not more serious or even fatal."

#### **Notes to Editors:**

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We seek to 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](http://hse.gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [legislation.gov.uk/](http://legislation.gov.uk/)
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

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## **Transport company fined after worker fractures skull**

A transport company has been fined £255,000 after a worker fell from a lorry and fractured his skull.

The man, who was working as a delivery driver for B Taylor & Sons Transport Limited, had been delivering glass to a customer when the incident occurred in Hinckley, Leicestershire on 4 December 2020.

As no forklift truck was available, the man was passing panes of glass from a stillage in the lorry to another worker on the ground.

The man then fell from the lorry, fracturing his skull, left hand, nose and right eye socket. He also sustained two bleeds on the brain, a 12 centimetre gash on his forehead and dislocated his right elbow.

He spent five days in hospital following the incident and has to make

significant adjustments to his day to day life. He struggles carrying out normal activities, including lifting moderate to heavy loads and carrying out DIY tasks in his home. He also experiences pain on a daily basis as a result of his injuries and feels a lot of uncertainty about what the future holds.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that B Taylor & Sons Transport Limited had failed to put in place appropriate control measures for unloading activities. Risks had not been considered and the work was being carried out unsafely.

HSE guidance can be found at: [Loading & unloading Vehicles safely \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/load/)

B Taylor & Sons Transport Limited, of Export Drive, Huthwaite, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £255,000 and ordered to pay £3,687 in costs at Leicester Magistrates' Court on 20 June 2023.

HSE inspector Nicholas Moreby said: "B Taylor & Sons Transport Limited failed to proactively plan and manage health and safety. The fine imposed on them should underline to everyone in the transport industry that the courts, and HSE, take a failure to follow the regulations extremely seriously.

"We will not hesitate to take action against companies which do not do all that they should to keep people safe."

This prosecution was supported by HSE enforcement lawyer Nathan Cook.

#### **Notes to Editors:**

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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. HSE guidance on [loading and unloading vehicles safely](https://www.hse.gov.uk/load/) is available.

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## **[Company fined after worker's fingers](#)**

## sliced off

A vape liquid manufacturing company in Manchester has been fined after a worker lost two fingers and a thumb while clearing a blockage in a packaging machine.

The agency worker at VN Labs Ltd was operating a nicotine liquid pod packaging machine at the firm's premises on Beacon Road, Trafford Park, when it became blocked on 22 October 2020.

While removing the plastic that was causing the blockage, the machine's blade was freed and sliced the worker's right hand.

This led to the amputation of two of the worker's fingers (index and middle) and thumb on his right hand after it became apparent they could not be reattached.

The 43-year-old man, who lives in Manchester, has been unable to work since the incident, now struggles carrying out everyday tasks and has suffered from mental health difficulties as a result of his injuries.

He said in his victim personal statement: "The accident has had an impact on my daily activities because from day one until now I did not have a day without pain. My mind has completely changed. I can't do simple tasks such as prepare eggs for my children. I used to enjoy hobbies like judo, jujitsu and climbing.

"My mental health has suffered because of the accident and is not regular like it was before, there is a lot of instability. I have good days and bad days. My financial situation has deteriorated and I feel like I have no control over anything. I can't work and I have to delay all my bills including my rent. It was never like this before."

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found the machine had recently been imported without any guarding. The engineering team at VN Labs assessed the machine and installed a see-through plastic guard over the top. Despite this, access to dangerous parts of the machine was still possible. There was also no formal written risk assessment for the blister pack machines. The company also failed to implement a safe system for clearing blockages and did not effectively supervise and monitor its working processes.



The packaging machine at VN Labs Ltd



The packaging machine at VN Labs Ltd

HSE guidance can be found at: [Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 \(PUWER\) \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/puwer/)

VN Labs Limited, of Beacon Road, Trafford Park, Manchester, pleaded guilty to breaches of Section 2 (1) and 3 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £180,000 and ordered to pay £7,490.05 in costs at Manchester Magistrates' Court on 16 June 2023.

HSE inspector Joseph Wright said: "This incident could so easily have been avoided. Employers should ensure they carry out an assessment of the risks and put in safe system of works for the operation of all machinery.

"Companies should recognise the need to ensure machinery is guarded to the standard of UK legislation even when imported from another country because they may have different laws around the standard of guarding."

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## **[Aircraft seat manufacturer fined £660k after worker fell through roof](#)**

A leading manufacturer of aircraft seats has been fined £660,000 after one of its employees suffered horrific injuries when he fell through a roof at a site in South Wales.

Safran Seats GB Limited was carrying out work to vacate its premises in Llantarnum Industrial Park in Cwmbran when the incident happened on 19 May 2020.

Kevin Lewis, who was 62 at the time, suffered multiple broken bones, including eight to his ribs, his collar bone, as well as a fractured skull. He had been dismantling and removing a spraying booth when he fell more than seven feet through its roof.



The incident happened at a Safran Seats site in Cwmbran

Mr Lewis was knocked unconscious as he hit the concrete floor and suffered a bleed on the brain.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found inadequate planning of the work at height meant suitable equipment wasn't used and insufficient instruction and training had been given to those carrying out the work.

In the five-year period between 2017 and 2022, 174 workers in Great Britain – a quarter of those killed in accidents at work – tragically fell to their death. HSE guidance can be found at: [Work at height – HSE](#).

Safran Seats GB Limited pleaded guilty at Cwmbran Magistrates Court on June 14 2023 to breaching section 33(1)(a) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and fined £660,000. They must also pay costs of £13,472.

HSE Inspector Seren Linton said: “Those in control of any work have a responsibility to devise safe methods of working.

“They should also provide the necessary information, instruction, and training to their workers on the safe system of working.

“If these basic practices had been followed, this incident would have been entirely preventable.”

## Notes to editors

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3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.



4. Advise on [preventing falls while working at height](#) is available.

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## [Serious failings found at hand car wash firms across South East](#)

Serious health and safety breaches were found by inspectors at 20 hand car wash businesses in West Sussex and Kent.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspected hand car washes around the counties as part of an inspection campaign. In Mid Sussex and Crawley, they found failings at each site they visited and failings were found at half the sites visited in Kent.



- Electrical faults such as damaged cabling is a common issue

Faulty sockets, damaged cabling, and defective equipment were just some of the common issues HSE inspectors found.

HSE says businesses are failing to protect their staff and customers as a new wave of inspections begins this week (w/c 19 June 2023).

The two-day inspection campaign ran in May and was in response to persistent safety problems with hand car wash businesses across the country. It follows the recent prosecution by HSE of a [car valeting company in the North East of England](#). The inspection campaign will now move on to East Sussex and Surrey.

The majority of issues identified related to [electrical safety](#) such as faulty sockets, damaged cabling, and defective electrical equipment. Inspectors also found some businesses didn't have [Employers Liability \(Compulsory\) Insurance](#)

in place while others lacked [basic toilet and other staff welfare facilities](#).



- Serious failings such as faulty sockets were found at hand car wash businesses across the South East

Principal Inspector Emma Stiles, who is leading the campaign, said that the results reinforced HSE's concerns about basic safety in the industry.

"Hand car washes have been identified as an area of concern for some time," she said.

"The fact basic safety issues were found at the majority of the premises we have visited so far have borne this out.

"A number of Prohibition Notices have been served meaning that there was an immediate serious risk of injury to staff and members of the public.

"Faulty electrical sockets and wiring are putting workers and the public at risk of serious injury from contact with electricity.

"Business owners need to understand the implications of cutting corners around safety."

The HSE campaign will now target other areas, including East Sussex (from Lewes to Bexhill-on-Sea) and Surrey (Elmbridge and Runnymede). These inspections will be carried out from June 19.

HSE is asking the public to be vigilant when using car washes and to report any issues to the regulator.

### **Notes to editors**

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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.
4. HSE guidance on [electrical safety and maintenance](#), [employers' liability insurance](#) and the [provision of welfare facilities](#) is available.