

# Balfour Beatty Utility Solutions Ltd fined half a million pounds after exposing workers to debilitating condition

Contractor Balfour Beatty Utility Solutions Ltd. has been sentenced today after exposing workers to a debilitating health condition over a nine-year period.

Balfour Beatty Utility Solutions Ltd was fined £500,000 after the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that workers at the company were exposed to hand-arm vibration between 2002 and 2011 which put them at risk of developing Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS).

HAVS is a permanent condition affecting the nerves and blood vessels of the hand. It can cause pain, tingling and numbness, making it difficult to carry out everyday tasks such as gripping and lifting objects, fastening buttons and zips, using a knife and fork or using a tooth brush. In some cases, the hands can have a continuous feeling of wearing mittens and hobbies such as fishing or gardening become impossible to do. Symptoms are often worse in winter when it's cold. The condition can render a worker disabled, affecting their chances of employment.

Sheffield Crown Court heard that workers at the company's sites were regularly exposed to hand-arm vibration while operating hand-held power tools such as hydraulic breakers and floor saws. An investigation carried out by HSE found that the company failed in its legal duty to ensure the risks to workers who used these tools was kept to as low a level as reasonably practicable. Balfour Beatty Utility Solutions Ltd. failed to assess the risk to workers' health, failed to put in place and monitor suitable risk control measures and failed to put in place a suitable system of health surveillance.

The company also failed to report to the enforcing authorities a significant number of cases of employees diagnosed with HAVS as was legally required.

Balfour Beatty Utility Solutions Ltd of Thorncliffe Park, Chapelton, Sheffield pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company also pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 5 (1) of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. These failings occurred between 2002 and 2011. The company was fined £500,000 and was ordered to pay costs of £195,000.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Christine Mellor said: "This case was about failing to protect workers. Exposure to hand-arm vibration is a well-known risk which Balfour Beatty Utility Solutions Ltd. failed to adequately control.

“The company failed to heed warnings. Early health surveillance detected ill health but still this was not acted upon to prevent on-going exposure.

“This is a particularly serious case because of the extent and duration of failures. The breaches were repeated over several years and this resulted in persistent poor compliance and significant harm to workers.”

**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. [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [www.legislation.gov.uk/](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/)
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. Worker exposure is from hand held power tools typically floor saws, cut off saws, compactor plates, rammers and/or jack hammers used to access utility services running underneath public highways and to repair/replace street lighting.

Journalists should approach HSE press office with any queries on regional press releases.