

Company fined after worker develops serious respiratory illness

An engineering company has been fined after a worker developed hypersensitive pneumonitis, a serious and irreversible respiratory illness, as a result of occupational exposure to welding fumes and metal working fluid over a 30-year period.

Liverpool Magistrates' Court heard how the welder-fabricator employed by PYC Engineering Ltd was at risk of inhalation of welding fumes and metal working fluid mists, potentially containing harmful bacteria. This exposure over his 30 year career with the company led to the development of the condition, which has seriously impacted the employee's life, preventing work and making oxygen necessary for day to day tasks. He is currently being assessed to ascertain whether a lung transplant would be beneficial.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found the company had failed to implement industry standard control measures such as Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV), Respiratory Protective Equipment and a management system for the metal working fluids.

Fluid systems, which contain water or water-mixes can become highly contaminated with harmful bacteria and must be monitored and controlled. Had these measures been observed, development of the illness could have been prevented.

PYC Engineering Ltd of Eastside Industrial Estate, Jackson St, St Helens pleaded guilty to a breach of Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay costs of £9,555.29.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Lianne Farrington said: "Companies should be aware of the need for a management regime in order to prevent occupational ill health and that failure to control exposure to metal working fluids and welding fumes can result in serious and irreversible respiratory illness."

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
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/

3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

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