

Company fined following asbestos exposure during maintenance work

A wood processing company has been fined after unsafe asbestos work was carried out at its premises in Macclesfield.

Manchester and Salford Magistrates' Court heard how, on 20 October 2016, in the aftermath of a large explosion at the Bosley site, Wood Treatment Ltd was directed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to fit new explosion relief panels to an asbestos cement-clad warehouse.

During an inspection by two HSE inspectors to assess progress, it was noticed that asbestos cement panels of the warehouse had been removed, cut to shape with power tools and replaced, breaching the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.

The HSE investigation into the incident found that while an external company had been contracted to fit the explosion relief panels, they did not work with asbestos containing materials, instead employees of Wood Treatment Limited removed the cladding. Following installation of the panels, some remedial work was necessary to repair holes left in the wall. The old asbestos sheets were cut to size and refitted.

Although the company was fully aware of the presence of asbestos and had an Asbestos Survey and Action Plan, this information was not shared with employees and measures were not put in place to contain the risks involved.

Wood Treatment Ltd of Tunstall Road, Bosley, Macclesfield pleaded guilty to a breach of Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £2,000 and ordered to pay costs of £3,000 and a victim surcharge of £170.

Speaking after the hearing HSE inspector Ian Betley said: "Asbestos is responsible for thousands of deaths in the UK every year but it only becomes dangerous when it is broken up and fibres are released into the air.

"Asbestos should only be removed by specialist contractors Wood Treatment Ltd put workers at risk by not following the correct safety procedures."

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>

4. For further information please go to:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/a14.pdf>

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