

Dog food boss spared jail after teenager lost finger on first day at work

The director of a dog food company has been given a suspended prison sentence after a teenage boy severed and lost his finger on his first day working at the firm.

Company director Gary Pitchford was given a six-month custodial sentence, which was suspended for a period of 12 months.

The new starter, who was 16 at the time, had been hired by Finer By Nature after leaving school and began working there on 15 July 2020.

Kidderminster Magistrates Court heard that the middle finger on the teen's right hand was sliced off while assisting another worker operating a food processing machine, used to package dog food, at the company's site at Whitestone Business Park in Hereford.

Despite there being an interlock guard on the machine, the young worker, who is now 19, was instructed to stand on a step ladder and put his hands into the hopper bowl to scrape meat into the base where there were dangerous moving parts of the machine.

This led to his middle finger being severed by the machine. He had two operations to close off the wound following the incident and stayed in hospital for six days in total.

The male said in a statement: "The emotional effect on me has been huge. At 16-years-old I felt so self-conscious, and this stopped me socialising, especially around strangers as they would always ask about my stump. I became very snappy with people including my own family because the trauma of what had happened upset me so much, it affected my mood and behaviour.

"I was experiencing flashbacks and phantom pains in my finger at night-time. Any sound that went snap caused a major flashback because I remember hearing the bone in my finger snap in the machine. I have never returned to the place where this happened, I actually don't even go down the road where the factory is, the thought of it all still makes me feel sick and faint."

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found Finer By Nature had failed to make suitable and sufficient assessments of the risks involved with this type of work and that Gary Pitchford, the director at Finer By Nature, had neglected to manage the safety of employees using the food processing machine.

Finer By Nature, of Whitestone Business Park, Whitestone, Hereford, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 3(1) and 3(4) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and Regulation 11(1) Provision and Use of

Work Equipment Regulations 1998. The company was fined £34,000 and ordered to pay £4,564.15 in costs at Kidderminster Magistrates' Court on 5 October 2023.

Gary Pitchford, of Whitestone Business Park, Whitestone, Hereford, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 37 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. He was sentenced to a six-month custodial sentence for each of the three offences to run concurrently, suspended for 12 months and 180 hours of unpaid work.

HSE inspector Sara Lumley, said: "This incident occurred on the first day of this young person's work.

"The machine was adequately guarded, and correct use of the guard would easily have been prevented this incident. The risks should have been identified before the machine was used.

"Employers should make sure they properly assess and apply effective control measures to minimise the risk from dangerous parts of machinery.

"The sentence handed out should act as a reminder to all employers that they will be punished if they don't protect their workers."

This prosecution was supported by HSE enforcement lawyer Jon Mack.

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.
2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.