

Employees sustain serious burns in explosion at vehicle servicing centre

A commercial vehicle servicing and repair company has been fined after two workers suffered serious burns when flammable brake cleaning fluid ignited causing a fire.

Birmingham Magistrates' Court heard how on 27 March 2020 two employees used brake cleaning fluid to clean the grease from the walls of a vehicle inspection pit in the workshop. Shortly after they had finished cleaning the walls there was a loud bang and the entire wall of the pit where the brake cleaner had been applied became engulfed in flames. One employee managed to get out of the pit and ran to help his colleague whose clothing had caught fire, pulling him out of the pit and extinguishing the flames. Both employees received burns to their hands and legs. One sustained 60 per cent burns and had to undergo an emergency surgical procedure to relieve the pressure from the swelling which involved cutting either side of his shins on both legs and his left knuckle going down to his wrist. He subsequently underwent five skin graft operations on his left hand and both legs and spent six weeks in hospital.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) into the incident, which occurred at STA Vehicle Centres Ltd in Starley Way, Birmingham, found that the company failed to carry out a risk assessment to consider whether it was possible to eliminate or reduce the risk. They had not considered replacing the dangerous substance with another non-flammable substance or using a different work process. Jet-washing, a safe alternative, was already in use at the company's other site.

The employees were not aware of the increased risks associated with using flammable fluid in a poorly ventilated area nor the need for appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to be worn.

STA Vehicle Centres Limited of Halesfield 22, Telford pleaded guilty to breaching Section 6 (1) of the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002. They were fined £28,000 and ordered to pay costs of £926.17.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Charlotte Cunniffe said "Employers should ensure flammable materials are used appropriately and provide training for employees in their correct use. This incident could have easily been prevented."

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. hse.gov.uk

2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
4. Further information about health and safety in motor vehicle repair and working with dangerous substances can be found at: https://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/ocs/800-899/803_71/803_71id.htm