

Explosives manufacturer fined £670,000 after worker dies

A manufacturer of military explosives has been fined £670,000 after an employee was killed and another seriously injured in an explosion at its factory near Salisbury.

The two men were working on the production of MTV – an explosive substance used in military flares – at the premises of Chemring Countermeasures Limited in High Post on 10 August 2018. They were cleaning a vessel used in the production and were removing residual explosive material in preparation for the next day's shift.

Piotr Zukowski, 29 of Southampton was partially inside the vessel when the remaining material exploded, killing him instantly. Another worker, Jake West, 32 was caught in the resulting fireball and sustained substantial burns.



Piotr Zukowski was killed following an explosion in 2018

Piotr's mother Elżbieta, said her life 'stopped' on the day her son was killed.

"At the time, I was on holiday in Greece with my younger, 13-year-old son Maks.

"Then, my son Piotr died at Chemring. That's when my heart stopped.

"I don't know how we got back, I don't know how I survived the next weeks. It was and still is a nightmare.

"Piotr went to work, as usual, and never came back.

“I could give all my money, my life, only for my son Piotr, at least for a moment, to appear in this world, so that I could hug him, to see his smile, to hear his voice.”



Piotr Zukowski and his mother Elżbieta

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Chemring Countermeasures Limited of Romsey, Hampshire, had failed to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. They had also failed to identify that explosive material was building up within work equipment, or to identify the sensitiveness of these explosives and had not put in place controls to ensure that this build-up of material did not present a serious risk to workers. Furthermore, workers were poorly supervised, allowing routine non-compliance with process instructions to take place.

The company holds an explosive licence, granted by HSE, which permits the manufacture and storage of explosives. Activities carried out in the corridor compromised the route of access and egress from the building and were contrary to the conditions of the licence. It was also custom and practice to have the doors to all of the bays in the building open during the working day, also contrary to the conditions of the licence.

When the initiation occurred, because explosive waste was processed and stored in the corridor, it was allowed to communicate to other parts of the building thus increasing the severity of the event. Mr West was injured, receiving serious burns, whilst working in the corridor.

Chemring Countermeasures Limited pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. They were fined £670,000 and was ordered to pay £12,835 costs at a hearing at Swindon Magistrates' Court on 27 June 2024. The prosecution was supported by HSE enforcement lawyer Alan Hughes and paralegal officer Ellen Garbutt.

After the hearing HSE inspector David Myrtle said: “This tragic incident led to the avoidable death of a young man. It could easily have been prevented.

“The failure to properly recognise the hazards posed by MTV throughout the production process, the unchecked build-up of waste MTV and a general lack of knowledge of good explosives practice meant the control measures in place were inadequate.”

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.
4. Guidance for [working safely with explosives](#) is available.