

Firm fined £115,000 after worker's hand was cut off in machine

A grandfather whose hand was cut off while he was repairing a factory machine has said his injuries are so bad he struggles to pick up his granddaughter for a cuddle.

Christopher Wright, 59, from Oswestry in Shropshire, had his hand cut off at the wrist when he was caught in the chain drive of a box-making machine while working a factory in Wrexham.

His hand was reattached during an 11-hour operation but Christopher has been left with lifelong effects.

He said: "It's impacted on everything I do every day. I can't go back to being an engineer, and I can't go back as an engineering manager as I can only type with one finger. I'm on the sick now.

"The effects are life changing, I'm in pain all the time, it hurts whenever I touch something. It's not something that gets better. I can't dress myself properly, I can't do up zips or tie my shoelaces.

"My wife has had to finish work just to look after me. I have a three-year-old granddaughter now and I can't even pick her up to give her a cuddle.

"Motorbiking was one of my greatest loves. I used to love riding my motorbike and I've had to sell it."

Christopher was repairing the machine when his hand became caught. "It all happened very quickly. I just thought 'my hand has gone'. I grabbed my wrist and shouted for help and dropped to the floor", he said.

Riftward Limited, trading as Playford Packaging, which employed Christopher, was fined £115,000 for breaching health and safety regulations.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) discovered the company's risk assessment was neither suitable nor sufficient as it had not considered the risks created from use of the machine, including during maintenance activities. There was no safe system of work in place to ensure safe isolation and access for tasks such as maintenance.

It also found it was common practice to bypass a gate that kept people and the machine separated, and to stand within the fenced area whilst the machine was in operation, demonstrating a lack of adequate supervision. Employees hadn't received any instruction for the safe isolation of the machine.

Riftward Packaging, of Ash Road, Wrexham Industrial Estate, Wrexham pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. The company was fined £115,000 and ordered to pay costs of £5,308 and a victim surcharge of £190 at Llandudno Magistrates' Court on September 14.

Christopher had worked at the packaging manufacturer for 18 months. He clearly remembers the day he lost his hand. He said: "We'd had problems with the belts lots of times, and it was no different to jobs I'd done every week. The machines have guards around them, it's a barrier to stop you going in. We'd opened the door and gone in. I was stood between the two arms of the machine. I'd done that many times.

"I asked the operator to start the machine as you had to get the machine running as quickly as you could. The chain grabbed my sleeve. The guy on the other side of the conveyor pulled me out from under the machine. They put a tourniquet on my arm and tightened it with a screwdriver. They retrieved my hand from the machine and that went in a bag with me to the hospital."

A Welsh Air Ambulance took him to hospital in Stoke, and from there he was transferred to Royal Derby Hospital's Pulvertaft Hand Centre, where surgeons re-attached his hand.

Mr Wright said: "Now I have some feeling in my hand, I have a little wiggle in my thumb and my fingers, but I can't pick anything up. There's no bend in my fingers. My hand is very sensitive, if something is a little bit warm, it feels burning hot, and if it's a cool, it feels freezing cold."

Mr Wright said that it was all too clear how devastating an impact failing to follow the regulations could have.

He said: "It was the attitude to health and safety there that makes me angry. Companies must stick to the health and safety rules, they have to be adhered to, they have to be followed. If companies don't follow them, it's a risk to people's lives. The cost isn't worth it. If there had been a proper health and safety policy, and it had been adhered to, I wouldn't be where I am now."

Speaking after the case HSE inspector Sarah Baldwin-Jones said "Those in control of work have a responsibility to devise safe methods of working and to provide the necessary information, instruction and training to their workers in that safe system of working.

"If a suitable safe system of work had been in place prior to the incident, the life changing injuries sustained by the employee could have been prevented."

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We seek to 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](https://www.hse.gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [legislation.gov.uk/](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/)

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