

Frutarom (UK) Ltd fined after two health and safety breaches

Food flavourings company Frutarom (UK) Ltd has been fined after two separate health and safety breaches.

Colchester Magistrates Court heard how the company was prosecuted following two separate Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigations into incidents at Frutarom's premises.

In October 2016 a worker at the company's Hartlepool factory was emptying a part-finished product from a drum into two smaller containers when the toxic gas hydrogen sulphide was released from the liquid being decanted.

In June 2017 an agency worker lost four of his fingers when his hand came into contact with mixing blades inside a mixing machine.

HSE's investigation into the 2016 incident found that Frutarom had used hydrogen sulphide gas as part of the manufacturing process for several years. They had danger warnings about the gas on their work instructions but did not instruct workers to carry out industry standard practices to safely remove the gas.

A HSE investigation following the 2017 incident found that the company failed to prevent access into the discharge chute of the machine after failing to identify this as a risk. The company was not aware of the significance of a grille cover on the discharge chute which, had it been fixed to the machine or interlocked, would have prevented the incident from occurring.

Relating to the incident in October 2016, Frutarom (UK) Ltd of Riverside Avenue West, Lawford, Manningtree, Essex pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The company was fined £60,000 and ordered to pay costs of £5,603.90.

Relating to the incident in July 2017, the company pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. It was fined £100,000 and ordered to pay costs of £3,992.51.

HSE inspector Edward Crick said: "The injuries sustained by the employee after the incident in July 2017 would have been prevented had a suitable and sufficient risk assessment been undertaken.

"Sadly, the company missed probably the most significant hazard associated with the use of the machine and therefore failed to take any appropriate action to eliminate the risk."

HSE inspector Julian Nettleton said: "It was fortunate that no one was harmed following the release of hydrogen sulphide in October 2016.

"Frutarom knew about the hazards of handling this chemical but had not

sufficiently considered the specific risks from the task which workers were routinely carrying out.

“Companies should ensure all tasks which expose employees to risk are suitably risk assessed. HSE will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action against those that fall significantly below the required standards.”

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. These cases were sentenced on the same day in the same hearing at Colchester Magistrates Court.
5. HSE’s website has statistics and further information on food machinery incidents (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/food/machinery.htm>)
6. Hydrogen sulphide exposure has been linked to fatal accidents, particularly in the offshore oil & gas, waste & recycling and farming industries. Further information and guidance on handling hazardous substances in the workplace is available on the HSE website. (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics/whatdo.htm>)
7. Hydrogen sulphide is a toxic gas that can kill. It is often associated with rotting waste and farm slurry but is commonly used in the chemical industry. The ‘rotten eggs’ smell of the gas is often noticed well below levels that cause harm, if the air contains enough of the gas the nose becomes overloaded and you cannot smell it.

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