

Furniture manufacturer fined after failing to manage employee's exposure of vibration

A North Wales company that manufactures sofas and chairs has been fined after failing to ensure that employee's exposure to the risks from vibrating tools was sufficiently risk assessed and managed.

Mold Magistrates' Court heard that Westbridge Furniture Designs Limited did not have a thorough risk assessment, adequate controls to manage exposure to vibration, or any health surveillance in place. They also failed to assess or take any action, following a diagnosis of carpal tunnel syndrome for two employees.

Following an investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in January 2020, it was discovered that, despite a HSE intervention in 2016, the company failed to properly assess the levels of exposure to their employees. This resulted in at least two employees being expected to carry out their normal duties, even though they had been diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome. One of the employees has suffered permanent nerve damage and is no longer able to work.

Westbridge Furniture Designs Limited of Greenfield Business Park, Greenfield, Holywell pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. The company was fined £150,000.00 and ordered to pay costs of £14,033.50.

Speaking after the case, HSE inspector Sarah Baldwin-Jones, said: "This was a case of the company completely failing to grasp the importance of managing their employee's exposure to vibration, whilst using hand-held tools.

"Employers should conduct a full assessment of the vibration magnitude and exposure duration, before reviewing whether employees are at risk. There is a simple online calculator to help them complete this process. Had this company followed the free guidance, they would not have exposed many employees to risk and possibly have prevented the ill health that has been suffered."

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. For more information about vibration tools in the workplace, visit:
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/vibration.htm>