

Norfolk farming company fined after death of worker

The grain storage facility

A family owned Norfolk farming company has been fined after an employee died at its grain storage facility.

Norwich Crown Court heard that on 9 July 2014, Arthur Mason, 21, took turns with a colleague to undertake cleaning work inside grain bins at Hall Farm, Fincham, near Kings Lynn, run by Maurice Mason Ltd. He was standing directly on the stored grain, using a broom to clean down the exposed inner surfaces of the bin. He wore a harness fitted with a fall-arrest lanyard, which was secured to a fixed ladder inside the bin.

He began to sink into the grain, which was emptying slowly through a small opening at the bottom of the bin several feet below its surface. The court heard that any such movement or cavity in grain may be enough to create a 'quicksand' like effect.

The forces involved caused the fall-arrest component of the lanyard to unravel and extend. This caused him to sink still deeper into the grain. After alerting colleagues, who tried to assist, he swiftly became engulfed in the grain and subsequently drowned, despite most determined rescue efforts by farmworkers and emergency services.

An investigation by Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the employer of the deceased, Maurice Mason Ltd, failed to adequately identify and manage the deadly risks associated with cleaning grain stores. There was no safe system of work in place for this task, nor had anyone involved been provided with suitable training in how to complete it safely.

Maurice Mason Ltd of Hall Farm, Fincham, Kings Lynn, Norfolk, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and was fined £50,000 and ordered to pay prosecution costs of £22,000.

Speaking after the hearing HSE Inspector Paul Unwin said: "This tragic incident led to the avoidable death of a young man. This death could easily have been prevented if his employer had acted to identify and manage the risks involved, and to put a safe system of work in place. There should be little need for anyone to enter such grain bins as it may be reasonably practicable to clean them remotely from outside".

"The dangers associated with grain storage are well known and a wealth of advice and guidance is freely available from HSE and other organisations."

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator

for workplace health and safety. It aims to reduce work-related death, injury and ill health. It does so through research, information and advice, promoting training; new or revised regulations and codes of practice, and working with local authority partners by inspection, investigation and enforcement. www.hse.gov.uk^{[1][1]}

2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: www.legislation.gov.uk/^{[2][2]}
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

Journalists should approach HSE press office with any queries on regional press releases.