

Speciality Gas company fined after employee overcome by fumes

A Speciality Gas Company from the Midlands has been fined after an employee was overcome by vapour whilst disposing of redundant gas bottles.

Stoke Combined Court heard how on 7 February 2015, four members of the Air Liquide (UK) Ltd Emergency Response Team were disposing of redundant gas bottles at the company's site in Tunstall. This involved two workers cutting the bottles open inside a purpose-built box, using a hacksaw operated from the outside. During the incident, one of the workers, wearing a bomb disposal suit and respiratory protective equipment (RPE) was carrying a bottle they had just cut open, when approximately 50 ml of highly hazardous liquid leaked from the bottle onto the floor. Vapour from the spill drifted downwind affecting two unprotected workers, one so badly he collapsed to the floor. Both were taken to hospital for treatment and tests and later discharged.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the system of work was inadequate. The Emergency Response team were not adequately informed or instructed to deal with the hazardous contents of the bottles. The work was not adequately supervised or nor was the very real risk of explosion adequately controlled.

Air Liquide (UK) Ltd of Station Road, Coleshill, Birmingham pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £160,000 and ordered to pay costs of £22,611.60.

Speaking after the hearing HSE Inspector Matthew Lea said "Employers have a duty to devise and train their workers in safe systems of work and make sure they are being followed. That starts with understanding the hazardous properties of the chemicals likely to be present in the bottles they required to handle. Their failures put the lives of their workers at significant risk"

For more information on gas cylinder disposal please go to British Compressed Gases Association (BCGA) website:

http://www.bcga.co.uk/pages/index.cfm?page_id=91 (There is no specific HSE guidance)

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. www.hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: www.legislation.gov.uk/

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.