Floor Installation Company Boss Fined $75,000

One minute he was applying a flammable solvent to a floor to loosen linoleum. The next moment he was engulfed in flames, with third and fourth-degree burns to most of his body. Miraculously, 32-year-old Spencer Beach survived, but he is permanently disabled and has endured 24 painful surgeries. He still requires more operations.

The man who hired him has been ordered to pay $75,000 for failing to ensure Beach's health and safety. Jeffrey Clements pleaded guilty to that charge, laid under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act.

In addition to being fined $5,000, Clements was ordered to make separate $35,000 donations to the Firefighters' Burn Treatment Unit at the University of Alberta Hospital and the Canadian Cancer Society. Those fines are the largest ever imposed on an individual in Alberta following a workplace injury.

Vapors from the solvent were ignited by a furnace inside a home in Edmonton, AB, in April 2003. Beach was able to stumble out of the house and one or more persons outside poured water on him. Given only five percent survival odds, he spent six weeks in a medically induced coma, followed by several months in hospital.

He suffered severe depression and sought psychiatric counseling to help him cope. His wife, who was pregnant when he was injured, subsequently gave birth to a daughter, whom he credits for helping lift his spirits.

Court heard Beach is working toward becoming a safety officer and professional speaker. He reportedly was not happy about Clements' hefty fines, saying he wishes that no fines were levied, but that people would learn something from his experience.

Clements reportedly was forced to sell his home and is now living in a motor home outside Edmonton. This powerful story brings home

the importance of knowing the dangers of working with volatile substances. Share this lesson with your workers.