Importance of Safety Training Fatality File

Lack of training and risk assessment leads to two deaths

Summary

Two farm workers were killed, whilst they were using a tractor mounted hydraulically driven machine used for winding up long lengths of rope. They became entangled between the rope and a rotating shaft. The machine was being used to wind up long lengths of rope used to secure polythene unto the metal hoops of the polytunnels, which protect the fruits grown on the farm. The standard practice was for one employee to stand about 6m behind the winding machine feeding the rope whilst the other stayed in the stationary tractor cab operating the controls. It is not known why the tractor driver left the cab without first turning off the machine. The bodies of both workers were found some hours after the accident.

The investigation concluded that the deceased men were using a tractor-mounted fleece winder machine, which was not suitable for rope winding as, due to its design, it had a significant rundown time after it was switched off and it did not have an automatic cut off and braking system in the event of entanglement.

The employees were not made aware of the dangers posed by the task and had not been adequately trained. This resulted in a tragic and preventable accident, which resulted in the loss of two young lives.

Action

Both the partnership which ran the farm, owned the machine and employed one of the men as well as the specialist company who were contracted to dismantle the tunnels were prosecuted.

The farming partnership were prosecuted under i) Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 for failing to ensure the safety at work of employees by the provision of safe plant and safe systems of work, and ii) Regulation 3 (1) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 for failing to undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risk to the health and safety of employees.

The company contracted to build and dismantle the polytunnels were prosecuted under Section 3 Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 for failing to produce a risk assessment.

Advice

Both the partnership and the specialist company who were contracted to dismantle the tunnels should have undertaken a risk assessment or at least ensured that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment had been done.

Farmers must ensure they take into account how machines should be operated when deciding safe working practices and if they want to use a machine for a purpose for which it was not designed, they should check with the manufacturer before doing so.

Farmers must also ensure that workers are trained for the tasks they are asked to do and made aware of any dangers. This case also highlights the necessity of carrying out a proper risk assessment, which would have shown the serious risk of entanglement.