Produce Safety: Restaurant Safety Fatality File

Serious burn injuries lead to serious fines for fast food restaurant

Staff were cleaning up after a busy Friday night at a fast-food outlet. The cook was walking back to the kitchen from the dishwashing area over a floor that had just been mopped by another employee. As he walked past the deep fryer, the cook suddenly slipped on the still-damp floor. He instinctively reached out to try and stop his fall, pulling over the electric deep fryer in a panic. The fryer toppled over, spilling its entire contents – 35 litres of boiling hot oil – onto the cook and the floor. As the oil came into contact with the water residue on the floor, thick black smoke was produced, which set off the smoke alarms and added to the extremely frightening situation. Surrounded in hot oil, the cook couldn't get up from the floor. Eventually, the trainee assistant manager succeeded in getting him out of the spilt oil, burning his own hands in the process.

The cook suffered extensive burns to his ankles, legs, buttocks, and chest and needed skin grafts. Another employee in the vicinity of the spilt oil also received severe burns to her right leg and ankle, again needing skin grafts.

The company was prosecuted by Manchester City Council and fined £60,000 after pleading guilty to two health and safety offences and ordered to pay costs of £16,000.

The judge found that poor floor maintenance, poor cleaning, poor footwear, and poor slip resistance of the floor tiles had the combined effect of increasing the likelihood of a slipping incident.

A senior scientist at the Health and Safety laboratory (HSL) who

carried out a forensic examination of the kitchen floor concluded that, ‘The slip risk experienced by users of the site was unacceptably high, given that it was reasonably foreseeable that oil and water would, from time to time, contaminate the floor.’

The company are taking the accident and subsequent prosecution very seriously. At all their stores nationwide, to prevent further slip accidents, they are making improvements to the flooring and to cleaning regimes and are providing all staff with slip-resistant footwear.