Working Safely With Solvents Fatality File

West Coast firm Coastwide Flooring fined $160k after worker killed by solvent fumes.

A West Coast flooring company must pay out more than $160,000 after a worker was killed by solvent fumes.

The man was laying carpet in a Greymouth building in March 2019 and was using a strong solvent-based adhesive.

A colleague found him unconscious, and he died three days later in Christchurch Hospital’s intensive care unit.

His employer, Coastwide Flooring, appeared in Greymouth District Court today and was fined $60,000 for failing to ensure the health and safety of its workers.

It was also ordered to pay a $105,000 in reparations to the victim’s family.

WorkSafe investigations manager for the South Island Steve Kelly said the company had a lax approach to health and safety.

“The particular adhesive the worker was using was known to be a health hazard, but the company had not undertaken a risk assessment on its use; it had no safe system of work for working with the adhesive – particularly in relation to ventilation and the use of fans; and nor did it provide effective information, training and instruction for workers,” he said in a statement.

“The company largely relied on the experience of its workers to protect themselves from the effects of the adhesive, and that approach was simply unacceptable.”

Kelly said Coastwide Flooring had since improved its operations since the tragic accident but it was too little, too late.