Case Studies for Work Accidents
Facing Young People

Sixteen-year-old has fingers severed in accident at work

A 16 year old from Sheffield lost three fingers in an industrial accident whilst working as a general handyman for a summer job.

Wade Lee Savage had just left school when he got the job in a packing factory where he was expected to make tea, fetch lunch for the workers and occasionally compile cardboard boxes with a staple gun. On the day of the accident, a big order came in and Wade was asked to use a machine that cut up cardboard sheets.

Sadly, Wade’s hand was caught in the machine and he lost three fingers in this industrial accident. With over four million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 working in this country it is inevitable that accidents involving them will occur, and figures indicate that for a number of these people accidents that happen during their early working lives cause serious and sometimes permanent injuries. Young people are more at risk because of their lack of experience, and therefore the employer has an even greater responsibility to safeguard their well-being. It is vital that employers of inexperienced workers provide the correct training and follow legislation set down to protect young workers.

In addition to the 14,500 young people who sustained serious injury it is also known that tragically 66 young workers under the age of 19 have been killed over the last decade.

Under the Health and Safety Young Persons Regulations 1997, employers are required to carry out risk assessments and to carefully assess the suitability of the young person for the work they have been employed to do. Employment laws can be complicated but it is the responsibility of the employer to be familiar with and to implement the law. For example, young people should not work between 10 pm and 6 am with certain exceptions. Workers
aged between 16 & 17 are entitled to take 12 hours of rest during a 24 hour period. Young workers are entitled to rest time of 48 hours in every 7 day period, compared to 24 hours for adult workers.

**Chicken Farm Accident**

A young boy, of fourteen years old, wanted to make some easy money. Alongside many of his friends and the local youths, working at the local poultry farm seemed his best bet.

On his first day, joining the exodus of local boys, he made his way to work, only to be greeted by what was described as an “obnoxious, gut-churning smell.” And that was it. A quick shake of hands with his employer, a offering of a lab coat, hat and optional beard net, and the fourteen year old was sent straight to the processing room, straight to work.

In the processing room, the bird is placed upon a conveyor belt. By the time it leaves the processing room it is ready for the supermarket freezers. Between the two states, there are many processes involving a wide variety of tools and machinery – all very sharp and complex.

The young boy should have been given the induction role, as a new, young, inexperienced employee. This induction role involved ensuring that the birds are dead by severing their necks and allowing the blood to drain out. Instead, however, he ended up on the machine which removed the wing feathers. This machine consisted of two high-powered rollers that pulled the wing inwards, stripping the feathers off. For the first couple of days, rather than been given health and safety information, direct measures or procedures, the only “safety warnings” this young boy received were that of rumours, horror stories and gory tales of accidents in his workplace.

On his third day of work, the fourteen year old was given a foot-long machete, and was expected to open up a turkey’s neck with it. This seemed simple enough. The only problem was, he was expected to do so, whilst the turkey was moving along a conveyor belt, upside down, above his head, and at a very high speed. This certainly was NOT simple.

To make matters worse, the only health and safety provision, passed on by chance, was a chain mail glove that felt as heavy as a bucket of lead to this fourteen year old.

Horrendous tasks were not the only downfall of this job. The young boy and his fellow young colleagues were expected to work a 14 hour shift; 14 hours of awful conditions, that, by the end of the day, would most certainly have physically and mentally drained them. The physical side of things was hard enough, but these boys were expected to make ethical and
moral decisions independently and quickly. This was imposed upon the young workers with authority, and with a complete disregard for their welfare.

The particular 14 year old’s attitude towards the slaughtering of the birds began to shift. “Birds began to lose their ironic dinner-plate anonymity and took on a strange ‘could be the family pet’ persona. This feeling, of course, made it difficult, almost impossible to kill the poultry” he said. “I also became more aware of hygiene and the risks associated with raw meat. There were endless reminders from my parents about this, too. I survived the two weeks and a 60lb turkey falling on me, with just cuts and bruises. I healed well physically – but not mentally. The two weeks work had left emotional scars.”

This can only be described as a dangerous job, with physical hazards, risks and constant threats to one’s safety, leaving mental and emotional damage.

**Crane Horror: This young worker was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He didn’t stand a chance.**

The young worker was employed on a construction site when a 750kg compressor was being moved by a mobile crane at a tunnel shaft on the site. At a height of five metres, the compressor fell from its chains and onto the young man. He didn’t have much of a chance being struck by such a heavy weight falling from a height – and he died from his injuries.

**What happened?**

Investigators found that young workers were not properly trained or even properly appointed to their jobs. This construction company had a poor attitude to health and safety and did not always follow correct safety procedures. This cost one young worker his life.

**Fast Burn: Melinda burnt at fast food restaurant.**

Melinda is 21 years old and had only been employed by a fast food company for about five weeks. Melinda was cleaning a bacon fryer and steamer unit. One compartment of that unit (the fryer) held hot cooking oil, while the other (the steamer) contained hot water. Melinda, through inexperience, mistakenly believed that both sections of the unit contained hot oil. She endeavoured to locate the oil drum into which, as she knew, the hot oil was to be poured and later disposed of, but found that it was outside the premises with the back door locked. She then asked the cook and restaurant manager how to dispose of the oil in the circumstances and was told to “put it in the bain-marie”, a metal bucket like utensil located on the floor of the area. Melinda then proceeded firstly to empty the hot water from the unit into
the bain-marie (under the impression it was hot oil) and then to pour the hot oil from the unit into the same container. When the hot oil hit the water it started to explode.

Melinda suffered severe burns to her body from the exploding hot oil. She was admitted to hospital, where she received appropriate treatment, and was absent from work for more than four weeks as a result of her injuries.

**Who was to blame?**

Melinda was partly to blame, as she wasn’t fully concentrating.

Similarly, the restaurant manager was in partial blame as they should have been supervising more carefully to spot any hazardous activity.

The company were fully responsible, however, as they failed their legal duties to have sufficient health and safety policies and procedures in the workplace.

**What happened next?**

Melinda made amends to always concentrate fully on tasks. The restaurant manager has taken action to provide better safety labeling and more staff so that they can supervise and train properly. The company have paid a fine of £10,000 and made a lot of changes to improve training, supervision and Health and Safety procedures.

**Lost Finger:**

Teenage girl loses part of finger after only one hour of doing her Easter holiday job. A 17 year old girl had to have part of the third finger on her left hand (the wedding ring finger) amputated after her fingers were crushed in a pie making machine at the bakery where she worked.
The teenager had been employed for the duration of her Easter holiday. She had only been working for one hour before the accident happened. Her left hand was dragged into the machine after she had tried to remove a pie from the machine’s rotating table.

She had touched a safety flap on a guard in front of the pastry press. But the machine was faulty and her hand was dragged through the flap so that the press came down on her fingers.

Magistrates heard a catalogue of faults in relation to the machine the girl used:

1. The safety brake which should have stopped the machine was faulty. It had been reported as such two weeks earlier when an almost identical accident occurred – but it had not been repaired;
2. The teenager had not received adequate training on the machine;
3. Her supervisor was not aware that she was using the machine until the accident happened;
4. There was no planned maintenance programme at the bakery prior to the accident.

**This young warehouseman tragically died when he drove a fork-lift truck without training or authorisation.**

At 9.00 pm in the evening, the young man got into a fork-lift truck and attempted to do a 180 degree turn at speed around the back of a trailer. The fork-lift overturned and he fractured his skull. The head injuries proved fatal and he died.

The young man was not employed to drive fork-lift trucks and he had received no training in using them. However, it was custom and practice to allow all employees access and use of the fork-lift trucks. Following this, the company were prosecuted and instructed to ensure that the keys to the fork-lift trucks were no longer available to non-trained staff.