Eye Injury – Restaurant Safety – Fatality File



McDonalds worker left partially blind following acid eye injury

Fast food chain McDonalds were fined more than £20,000 by Wandsworth Council following an incident which left one of its employees partially blinded by an acid-based cleaner.

The company was fined by the council under safety at work laws and according to Wandsworth Council, this was the first successful prosecution against McDonalds in the UK resulting from an accident in the workplace.

The incident took place at the McDonalds restaurant on 20th June 2008 while an employee attempted to unblock a waste pipe. The staff member suffered severe burns to his face and eyes and has been left with around 55% vision in his left eye.

The court heard how the worker had attempted to unblock a drain after staff at the restaurant had noticed that a washing machine was not working. In order to remove the blockage, the restaurant bought a corrosive chemical drain cleaner. When the first attempt at using this sulphuric acid based cleaner failed to dislodge the blockage, the employee was given money by a manager to buy another bottle.

When the worker poured more of the chemical into the drain, the contents blew back into his face and into his eyes. He was given first aid before being taken to hospital by ambulance.

He sustained burns which following treatment, have left him with around 97% vision in his right eye and only about 55% in his left eye.

Wandsworth Council found that the restaurant did not carry out a CoSHH risk assessment prior to using the chemical. Cllr Sarah McDermott, environment spokesperson, stated “Their member of staff was given money by his managers to buy a very hazardous product. No risk assessment was carried out to ensure this product was safe to use, he was not properly supervised while using it, he was not given any training to reduce the risk of an accident, nor was he provided

with protective clothing.

“This was a serious lapse in the company’s internal procedures. Using a hazardous chemical to clean a drain would involve obvious safety risks.

“In this case the company failed in its duty of care to this member of staff. As a result he has been left with a permanent and debilitating eye injury.

“We hope this case will serve as an important reminder to all employers that they must always take proper steps to ensure the safety of their employees in the workplace.”

McDonalds Restaurants Ltd appeared in court on 11th November 2010 and pleaded guilty to breaching s2(1) of the HSWA 1974. They were fined £5000 and ordered to pay costs of £15,744.

A spokesman for McDonalds said: “We are very sorry for the eye injury incurred by our staff member. We regret that on this occasion our stringent safety procedures were not followed, and we have taken steps to make sure this doesn’t happen again.”