

## Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

### Tiffany Ward's story

#### Background to Tiffany's incident

On 14 October 2008, 18-year-old Tiffany Ward (nee Upton) sustained horrendous injuries to both of her arms when they were dragged into a rotating auger screw of a potato processing machine.

Tiffany, a factory process worker, had been cleaning food scraps out of the auger when its blades were activated, quickly cutting her arms to shreds.

Tiffany spent 40 minutes trapped in the machine with her arms above her head while emergency services rushed to the scene. She was airlifted to hospital where doctors performed more than 30 hours of surgery including bone and skin grafts. Although the surgeons were able to save her arm, she will never regain use of her right hand and her left hand and arm has been left with restricted mobility.

#### How did this happen?

Housekeeping procedures, such as cleaning, (commonly known as non-production tasks) often have lower attention paid to them and can be easily overlooked as a source of risk to workers.

Removing the auger's guard for cleaning was a common practice in this company, but it also exposed staff to the risk of an injury occurring. As no previous risk assessment had been conducted there was no control measure to eliminate or minimise the risks of injury.

#### Appropriate control measures

Had an effective control measure been implemented, the incident would not have occurred. Risk assessments should consider a hierarchy of control measures to ensure the

most appropriate control measure for the apparent risk is applied. Under a hierarchy of controls, the following measures could have been introduced:

- Remove the machine and replace it with a safer system of work (elimination).
- Install permanent guarding to prevent by-passing or disabling (design).
- Introduce stricter planning for cleaning and other procedures (administrative).
- Use specific tag in/tag out safety switches (isolation).

By conducting risk assessments, businesses can clearly identify areas that require attention and then take preventative action. Businesses can not afford to wait for an incident to occur before they change a process or buy more up-to-date equipment. The message is clear—fix it now before it injures someone or costs them their life.

#### Who was responsible?

The company pleaded guilty to breaching s.28 (1) of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* at the Brisbane Magistrates Court in March 2010 and fined \$43 000.

The business was responsible because it failed to meet its workplace health and safety obligations. A person in charge of a business or undertaking has a duty of care to ensure the safety of their staff. The business was required to take precautions against the risks, including managing the risks associated with unguarded moving plant.

The investigation findings presented to the court revealed:

- the defendant failed to have in place, a safe system for performing the task of cleaning the machine without exposing

workers to the risk of injury from moving parts

- the injured worker had not received a safety induction for performing the task
- there was no system in place to ensure the machine was turned off before cleaning commenced
- the defendant had failed to undertake any hazard identification or risk assessment in respect of the machine, or implement any control measures in respect of the machine.

### Lessons learned

In addition to using industry codes of practice, it is recommended that all businesses have a risk management approach for their workplace.

Each business must:

- have a planned way of identifying hazards and assessing risks that may result in injury by undertaking a risk assessment for each source of risk (including hazardous manual tasks like cleaning an auger)
- have a process to analyse the outcomes of the assessment
- be able to decide on the most appropriate control measures to address the risks
- implement the required controls within a set timeframe and monitor and review the effectiveness of the controls—especially when circumstances change or use of the plant changes
- ensure staff are equipped with and know how to use all necessary personal protective equipment.

Work health and safety legislation is in place to prevent a workplace or workplace activities causing a person's death, injury, or illness, as well as minimising a person's exposure to risk.

The key failing of most businesses in the risk management procedure is in implementing the findings and recommendations as a

business priority. Businesses must make the safety of their staff a priority. Staff need to know that those in control of the business take their safety seriously.

Adequate training and supervision are fundamental to ensuring the safety of staff. Training ensures that staff understand correct work procedures and know their duties in the use and maintenance of plant, as well as the reasons why certain procedures or guards are in place.

Supervision is required to ensure that staff are working within the approved guidelines and that the environment has not changed from when the risk assessment was first done.

### For more information

Visit the [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call the WHS Infoline on 1300 369 915.

Tiffany's message is to take workplace health and safety seriously: "It can happen to anybody. It doesn't only happen to middle aged men."

Visit [Tiffany's campaign](#) to find out more about her incident.

### Other relevant information

[Plant Code of Practice 2005](#)

[Hazardous Manual Tasks Code of Practice 2011](#)

[How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks Code of Practice 2011](#)

[Children and Young Workers Code of Practice 2006](#)

[Prosecution - Wickham Farms Killarney Pty Ltd](#)

[Guide to safeguarding machinery and plant Personal protective equipment](#)

[Manufacturing industry](#)

[Alerts—Safe use of guarding of meat processing machinery](#)

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