

# C J T Services Ltd

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## Health and Safety Management

### Safety Bulletin 83

#### Maintenance workers – toxic gas risk

This bulletin is based on a recent news story published by IOSH, which involved three employees being overcome by toxic gas.

The incident occurred at a blood and feather-processing plant in Newark, and could have proved fatal if it had not have been for the quick reactions of workmates at the scene.

A team of workers had been called out on the night of February 26<sup>th</sup> 2006, to rectify a blockage at the plant, which had only been operating for six to eight weeks. Robert Warriner (operator-fitter) and Przemyslaw Cliber (general labourer) investigated the situation and decided the source of the blockage was a condenser, attached to a storage vessel. The employees had not been informed that the vessel was likely to contain either hydrogen sulphide or carbon dioxide (a by-product of the rendering process), both of which considered toxic when inhaled in high concentrations.

To access the condenser, the men used a cherry-picker. As they were working to clear the blockage, gas was suddenly released, and the two men fell unconscious. There had been PPE and respiratory equipment available, but the workers' lack of awareness of the hazards meant it was not used.

On realising there was a problem. A third employee, David Szypusz used an additional cherry-picker to reach the men. He climbed over to assist them, and then lowered them down to the ground where they were treated with the help of a fourth colleague.

Warriner required artificial ventilation for four days, while Szypusz was also treated in hospital for the effects of inhaling the gas.

As a result of the hearing at Nottingham Crown Court, JG Pears (Newark) Ltd was fined £100,000 and ordered to pay £38,052 costs after pleading guilty to breaching s2(1) of the HSWA 1974 and reg. 3(1) of the MHSWR 1999. The fine was split equally between the two offences. In mitigation, the company said it had installed level and pressure monitoring equipment to help identify future potential blockages. It also said that it had taken steps to make sure the incident could not happen again – one example being training directors and workers in health and safety. It now has a new health and safety manager and operations director.

HSE's investigating inspector, Francine Clarke said:

*"The company should have assessed the design of the plant and the probability of blockages. They should then have made sure that employees had the correct instruction, training and supervision, PPE etc. to deal with any hazards."*

**If you require any further information, clarification or assistance with the above, then please do not hesitate to contact us;**

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**Source – Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH)**