

MEDIA RELEASE



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COMPANY FINED \$50,000 OVER WORKPLACE INCIDENT

One for Australia's biggest food manufacturers appeared in court today over an incident that left a worker with a crushed hand after it was caught in a machine.

George Weston Foods Limited was convicted and fined \$50,000 at the Castlemaine Magistrates' Court today after pleading guilty to one count of failing to provide a safe plant.

The court heard the incident happened when a woman was packing frankfurts on a processing machine at the company's Castlemaine smallgoods plant, which trades as Don KRC, on 30 July 2010.

The plastic wrapping got stuck and had to be removed. The machine was switched off, guarding was removed and the woman was clearing the blockage when a colleague, who was unaware work was still being done, turned it back on.

As a result, the worker suffered crush injuries and burns to her hand when it was trapped between a hot plate and the top of the machine.

An investigation into the matter found the company was aware the machine did not comply with Australian standards and that it could fail to stop when guarding was opened.

In sentencing, Magistrate Cottrell considered the company's guilty plea, co-operation with the investigation, subsequent remedial measures and that it was in the process of addressing OHS issues across the site when the incident happened

Changes to the machine's guarding were implemented by the company immediately after the incident, the court was told.

WorkSafe Manufacturing, Logistics and Agriculture Director, Ross Pilkington, said providing appropriate guarding was a fundamental part of many businesses, especially those working in manufacturing.

"Appropriate guarding is one of the easiest steps that can be taken to ensure workers do not injure themselves," he said.

"Equipment maintenance often comes at little to no cost and ensures workers get home safely at the end of the day."

"This incident could have been easily prevented if there was an effective lockout-tag out (LOTO) system in place to effectively prevent the accidental starting of machinery."

"Businesses need to constantly look at ways they can make their workplaces as safe as possible.

"If there are instances where guarding is not doing its job, or machines can operate without it, employers need to fix this as a matter of urgency. Not doing so is just not worth it."

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