



SafeTalk



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FIRST SENTENCE UNDER 'WESTRAY' BILL NOT GOOD ENOUGH



United Steelworkers' (USW) National Director Ken Neumann says the fine for the first-ever criminal conviction under 2004 changes to the Criminal Code of Canada does not do justice to the legislation or to the family of the worker killed on the job at Quebec-based Transpavé Inc.

A judge has fined a Quebec company \$110,000 for criminal negligence in the death of an employee in a decision believed to be a first in Canada.

Steve L'Ecuyer, 23, was killed in October 2005 when he was crushed by a machine with an unplugged safety device. Transpavé, a paving-stone manufacturer based north of Montreal, pleaded guilty in December to a count of criminal negligence.

"A fine of \$110,000 following a conviction of criminal negligence causing death is not in keeping with the intent of the legislative changes that Steelworkers fought for over a decade to achieve," said National Director Ken Neumann. The Criminal Code changes are known as the Westray Bill, after the deaths of 26 miners in the 1992 explosion of the Westray coal mine in Nova Scotia.

"We are pleased that the Westray Bill has finally resulted in a conviction and we will continue the fight to have corporations, their directors and executives criminally accountable for putting workers' lives at risk," Neumann said.

Coming Events

April 23 Safer Communities Workshop, Kelowna BC

April 24 Safer Communities Workshop, Kamloops BC

April 28 National Day of Mourning

May 11-14 National HS&E Conference, Toronto Ontario

Fatality in Local 7619

John Wilson, 62, and a member of local 7619 was killed February 28th when the excavator he was operating at the Craig Mont Mine near Merritt BC fell into a sink hole in a pond.

John's co-workers tried valiantly to save John's life as the excavator sank into the pond.

"John was a husband, father, grandfather and good friend to many," said local 7619 president Richard Boyce. "He was also a strong trade unionist fighting hard on everyone's behalf who worked at the mine," Boyce added. "John had been employed at the operation since 1991 and was one of the key activists responsible for bringing in the Steelworkers to represent the workers. He was the union's Chief Shop Steward and actively participated at the bargaining table during every round of negotiations. He truly will be sadly missed by many." The investigation into the accident is ongoing.

Our sincere condolences go out to John's family, friends and co-workers.

Company Charged in Mine Accident

The Agrium potash mine at Vanscoy has been charged with 10 workplace and mining offences in connection with an accident that cost a miner the use of his legs.

Representatives of the company, based in Calgary, are to appear in provincial court in Saskatoon on April 14.

"I'm glad it's going to court, but it's not going to change anything," Paul Goddard said Thursday. Goddard was crushed by about 900 kilograms of rock while working underground on Aug. 31, 2006. His spinal cord was broken and his two arms were shattered. The 29-year-old spent nearly five months in hospital. Doctors have told him he will never walk again.

Reports by Saskatchewan Labour's occupational health and safety branch, earlier obtained by The Saskatoon StarPhoenix, said "cutting and ground control processes at Agrium were substandard and unacceptable."

One report cited Agrium's failure to identify risks and follow established mine safety systems as immediate causes of the accident. Inadequate training of supervisors and workers were listed as other reasons. Agrium Inc. is charged with contravening four sections under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and six sections under the province's Mines Regulations.

The offences in carry a total maximum \$300,000 fine. But Goddard said fines against a large company such as Agrium won't mean much. He wants to see the mine make even more safety improvements. "I'd rather not see anyone else go through this," he said. "I'm more concerned about the people who still work there. I have friends that still work there, and they have families."

HAZARD ALERT

- A worker received serious injuries resulting from a paint can exploding in a debris fire, striking the worker in the upper area of the body.
- A millwright reached through a gear and sprocket drive on a wood waste conveying and screening system (hog disc scalper) to grease a bearing. The equipment was not locked out. An apprentice millwright started the equipment resulting in serious injury to the millwright.
- **A certified faller was fatally injured when he was struck by the top of a danger tree approximately 138 feet tall.**
- At about 02:00 AM a worker appears to have attempted to clear a trim block box under a trim saw in a sawmill. The worker's lower extremities contacted the trim saw causing serious injuries.
- A worker was seriously injured when he was using a power saw to rip a fir log, which was 4.3 meters long and 1.5 meters in diameter. The worker lost footing and fell under the log slabs, when the ripping cut was completed and the log slabs shifted.
- A worker was injured when he was clearing crossed boards at the in feed area of a planer machine when the worker was caught between the board and an energized and rotating 'pineapple' roll.
- A worker was injured when his 8-axle loaded log truck left the loading area to commence the trip to a sawmill. While slowly transversing a left leaning bend in the road the back wheels of the trailer went over a small bank pulling the trailer and truck unto its drivers side.
- A worker was attempting to straighten a skewed 9-foot log in the in feed unscrambler by hand when the log suddenly straightened. The worker was seriously injured when the workers hand was caught between the handrail and the log.
- A utility labourer who was working alone at the time of the accident was found caught between the travelling arm of the Head Master automated equipment and the walkway in a pit.
- A worker was using a "zip-cut" type metal cutting wheel on a small hand held grinder with the guard removed. The wheel shattered causing serious injuries.
- When working on a steep slope during a cable operation, a hooktender slipped on the snow pack, resulting in a piece of logging debris (stick) puncturing and tearing off a portion of flesh on the workers upper extremity.
- A sawyer was seriously injured by a shingle machine circular saw when it came off the arbour at full speed.

British Study Links Radiation to Heart Disease

Nuclear power plant workers exposed to chronic radiation may face a higher risk of heart disease, according to a large British study published recently.

Other research has shown that high exposure over a short period of time may cause heart disease but the new findings link exposure to long-term exposure at relatively lower levels, the researchers said in the International Journal of Epidemiology.

"Our results provide more evidence of a link," said Steve Jones, a researcher at Westlakes Scientific Consulting, who led the study. "This adds to the evidence of similar associations from other studies.

The researchers cautioned that further studies were needed to consider factors such as diet, exercise, cholesterol levels and smoking habits that affect the risk of heart disease.

The study focused on more than 65,000 workers employed between 1946 and 2002 at four sites operated by British Nuclear Fuels plc and its predecessors. The team analyzed non-cancer death rates and cumulative radiation exposure using the workers' personal dosimeter badges.

Comparing the some 42,000 workers exposed to relatively high levels of radiation to office workers and other employees pointed to an increased heart disease risk, the researchers said.

The effect on life expectancy was slight, about a year at most, while the risk was greatest for people who worked before the 1980s when safety conditions improved, the researchers said. The risk rose with the level of radiation exposure.

The top doses in the study -- funded by British Nuclear Fuels plc and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority -- were also typically 5 to 10 times lower than radiation experienced by atomic bomb survivors, the researchers said.

Dudley Goodhead, a radiation expert at Britain's Medical Research Council, who was not involved in the study, said studies of atomic bomb survivors in Japan had suggested a link with heart disease too.

"The findings of the present study clearly suggest that even chronic exposure to radiation, spread over long periods of time such as received by some radiation workers in the past, may also be able to cause increased heart disease," he said.

Grupo Mexico-Mine Union Closer to Ending Strike

Mexican miner Grupo Mexico and the national miners union moved closer to resolving a long-running strike at the giant Cananea copper pit after the two sides sat down for new talks recently. The labor ministry called the union and the company to the negotiating table for the second time in two weeks to end the dispute, which began last July when workers laid down tools at Cananea over health and safety concerns.

The miners say thick piles of dust and disconnected ventilators at the mine are a major health hazard, but the company says the problems have been fixed.

Grupo Mexico says the talks have been complicated by a dispute with union leader Napoleon Gomez, who was accused by the company and some workers of misusing \$55 million paid to the union after Cananea was privatized. Gomez has been cleared. He moved to Canada to avoid imprisonment in Mexico and is awaiting a ruling that will allow him to return to Mexico.

The union has successfully negotiated labor contracts with other mining companies this year but the conflict with Grupo Mexico simmers on, partly due to resentment over the death of 65 miners in a 2006 explosion at a Grupo Mexico coal mine, which Gomez publicized. The government said this week it was too dangerous to dig out the miners' bodies, despite pleas from family members.