

Vegetable business fined \$33,000 over worker's crushed thumb

A Wattleup vegetable packing and export business has been fined \$33,000 (plus almost \$1200 in costs) over a lack of machinery guarding, that resulted in a worker's thumb being crushed.

North East Equity Pty Ltd – trading as Sumich's – pleaded guilty to failing to provide a safe workplace and, by that failure, causing serious injury to an employee, and was fined in the Fremantle Magistrates Court.

At the time of the incident in May 2011, the injured employee was working in the area of the operation where carrots were graded and packed. The employee has been left with a permanent loss of function and motion in her thumb and could not return to work until February 2013. She had been employed by Sumich's for approximately the last 20 years.

On the day of the incident, the bin cradle lowered and crushed her right thumb against the bin tipper frame. Unfortunately she had returned to the floor and could no longer reach the controls to raise the tipper, so another employee had to rush over and raise the lever to release her.

The pinch point between the tipper frame and the bin cradle had never been guarded and no formal risk assessments had been undertaken nor written safe work procedures developed for the workers.

WorkSafe WA Commissioner Lex McCulloch said today the case illustrated the importance of guarding hazardous parts of machinery and having safe work procedures in place at all times.

"In total, these changes cost the employer a couple of thousand dollars. If they had been made earlier, this incident would not have occurred and the employee involved would have been spared a great deal of suffering and a permanent injury." McCulloch concluded.

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