BAE company sentenced over worker’s firing range injury

Date:
19 September 2014

BAE Systems Global Combat Systems Munitions Limited has been fined £80,000 for a serious safety breach after a worker’s leg bone was shattered while test firing a gun on a range in Northumberland.

The 46-year-old employee, from Hexham, was seriously injured when a metal bolt weighing 7kg ejected from the back of the gun and into his left leg. He spent six weeks in hospital and his injured leg is now 20mm shorter than his right.

The incident, on 3 April 2008 at the company’s Ridsdale range, was investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which prosecuted the BAE Systems munitions subsidiary for safety failings.

Newcastle Crown Court heard today (19 September) that an aiming device, known as a boresight, had been left in the barrel of the medium-calibre gun when it should have been removed before firing.

When the worker fired, a round smashed into the boresight, causing the round to collapse and jam at the end of the barrel. As a result, the gas which had propelled the round was trapped in the barrel and pressure began to build. As the employee turned the handle on the breech bolt holding the round, it was expelled with great force into his leg by the trapped gas.

An HSE investigation found that although BAE Systems Global Combat Systems Munitions Limited recognised the hazards of not removing a boresight before firing and had interlocked other guns to avoid this type of incident, they had failed to implement the same standards on this weapon.

BAE Systems Global Combat Systems Munitions Limited, Warwick House, Farnborough Aerospace Centre, Featherstone, Farnborough, Hampshire, was fined £80,000 and ordered to pay £100,000 costs after pleading guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

After the case, HSE Inspector Philip Smith, said:
“This is a highly specialised global company whose safety standards should be industry-leading. There were recognised preventative measures that should have been employed to make sure this kind of serious incident could not happen. As a result of their safety failure, a worker suffered a terrible injury.

“BAE Systems Global Combat Systems Munitions Limited was fully aware of the dangers of not removing a boresight before firing and had fitted interlocks onto their other guns to prevent this type of incident from occurring. However, the company neglected – for whatever reason – to make sure a similar guarding mechanism was in place with this weapon.

“This incident emphasises the need for management to ensure preventative measures are effectively implemented on all equipment used at work.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. It aims to reduce work-related death, injury and ill health. It does so through research, information and advice, promoting training; new or revised regulations and codes of practice, and working with local authority partners by inspection, investigation and enforcement.

www.hse.gov.uk[1]

2. Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 states: “It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees.”

3. HSE news releases are available at http://press.hse.gov.uk/[2]

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