

## Retailer Fined \$100,000 After Crippling Young Worker

One of Australia's biggest retailers, Woolworths Limited, has been convicted and fined \$100,000 for inadequately training a young worker who was seriously hurt while lifting a 20kg bag of onions.

WorkSafe's Executive Director, John Merritt, said workers must be properly trained and supervised, particularly if they are young or inexperienced. They must also have the equipment to do their job without suffering a tragic, permanent, injury. "This case is a reminder of the consequences which can arise from inadequate health and safety practices."

Magistrate Phillip Goldberg was told the tasks of unloading produce, moving pallets with a pallet jack, stocking produce and handling empty pallets and waste products had all resulted in injuries in Woolworths stores before this incident.

The Occupational Health and Safety (Manual Handling) Regulations 1988 mandated that risks to health and safety had to be examined and assessed, together with the requirement that employees be provided with appropriate training. Neither of these requirements were met.

Part-time shop assistant Michael Collins collapsed a short time after lifting the bag of onions which gave him a sharp pain in his back in April 1999. He never walked again. Mr Collins died in June last year from an unrelated incident.

WorkSafe told the court that although Mr Collins remembered seeing an induction video which had a small portion on lifting when he began working at Safeway in 1997 there was:

- No instruction on stock handling.
- No formal process for risk assessments in stores.
- The Glen Waverley outlet did not have a health and safety representative.
- Store managers had no training in conducting hazard identification, risk assessment or control.

In sentencing Woolworths, Magistrate Goldberg said the company was large with considerable resources and should have done more to train its workforce however he noted improvements had been made after the incident.

"In 1999 it was nothing new to be concerned about health and risks with respect to manual handling," he said.

Mr Merritt said manual handling injuries accounted for about 46 per cent of all WorkCover claims. Nearly 43,000 manual handling injuries have been reported in Victoria in the past three financial years.

"This comes at an enormous cost to the community in both personal and financial terms. In some cases the injuries are truly life-changing, not just for the worker, but also family members who often become carers.

### Alert



"A large number of people coming into the workforce at this time are like Michael, young and relatively inexperienced. They should not be exposed to risk.

"The causes of manual handling injuries are well known as is what can be done to prevent them.

"In very many cases simple measures like providing suitable equipment, appropriate workplace design, training and supervision can make a significant long-term difference to someone's life."

WorkSafe produces information about manual handling issues. It can be obtained on the web at [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au) or by calling the advisory service on 1800-136-089.

The charges: Sections 21(1)&(2)(a) and s21 (2)(e) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985.

#### s21 Duties of employers

(1) An employer shall provide and maintain so far as is practicable for employees a working environment that is safe and without risks to health.

(2) Without in any way limiting the generality of sub-section (1), an employer contravenes that subsection if the employer fails -

(a) to provide and maintain plant and systems of work that are so far as is practicable safe and without risks to health.

(e) to provide such information, instruction, training and supervision to employees as are necessary to perform their work in a manner that is safe and without risks to health.

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