

Food and beverage wholesaler ordered to pay over \$128K after employee fatally injured in forklift incident

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The tragic consequences of a worker not receiving adequate training in operating a forklift have been highlighted in a District Court sentencing against a food and beverage wholesaler.

Daisuke Yokoyama was killed on March 9 this year after sustaining serious injuries to his torso when he became trapped between a cross beam on a racking unit and the console of the forklift he was operating at a Lower Hutt warehouse.

Tokyo Food Company Limited (TFL) was sentenced at the Lower Hutt District Court after pleading guilty to one charge under the Health and Safety in Employment Act for failing to take all practicable steps to ensure the safety of its employee, Mr Yokoyama.

A WorkSafe New Zealand investigation found that multiple failures by the company contributed to the incident.

These included TFL's failure to ensure that all staff expected to operate forklifts were trained. Mr Yokoyama, along with several other employees, operated forklifts despite the fact that they had not received adequate training to drive forklifts.

The company also had no safety management system in place for identifying and assessing hazards, and had no established safety rules or hazard controls in relation to using forklifts and other tasks carried out in a warehouse.

Mr Yokoyama's family will receive \$76,994 in court ordered reparation and Tokyo Food Company Limited has been fined \$52,000.

In sentencing, Judge Davidson made it clear that the level of training at TFL was a significant departure from the industry standard.

WorkSafe Chief Inspector, Keith Stewart, says it is vital that workers who are expected to operate heavy machinery such as forklifts have the correct training, and that effective safety management and training systems are in place.

"Sadly, in this instance, Mr Yokoyama has paid the ultimate price for the company's failure to meet these requirements," Keith Stewart says.