

Sellafield investigation - £380k fine after safety breach

Sellafield Ltd has been fined £380,000 for safety breaches relating to equipment used for the processing of plutonium.

On 2 April 2019, Carlisle Crown Court was told how, on 5 February 2017, a worker at the West Cumbria plant received a puncture wound to one of his hands while working in a glovebox used to process radioactive materials.

The incident resulted in the worker receiving an intake of plutonium equal to approximately eight times the maximum legal annual exposure limit for workers in the nuclear industry.

The investigation by the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) found that the worker was following his employer's system of work while cleaning a probe used as part of an alarm system. This was a difficult operation and the contaminated probe, which had corroded and become sharp, punctured his hand through a protective glove.

Sellafield Ltd pleaded guilty to offences under Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, was fined and was also ordered to pay costs of £96,753.22.

Speaking after the hearing, ONR Superintending Inspector Paul Smith, said: *"This was a case where Sellafield Limited failed to properly assess the risk to workers arising from sharp objects when working in a glovebox.*

"The accident could have been avoided had the corroded probe been routinely replaced – a change that was put in place by the company immediately after the event."

Dr Mina Golshan, Deputy Chief Inspector and Director of ONR's Sellafield, Decommissioning, Fuel and Waste Division, said: *"We note the conclusion of this case and the recognition by Sellafield Ltd that, for this particular incident, the company fell short in its legal duty to protect the safety of one of its employees.*

"This case does not point to any broader concern about the control of risks and hazards across the Sellafield site and was instead related to a specific event and the outcome of our subsequent investigation. Sellafield Ltd has already learned lessons from this event, implementing improvements to help prevent a recurrence, and we expect it to continue to seek reasonably practicable improvements in all areas of its work affecting safety.

"This will not affect our regulatory strategy for Sellafield which encourages the safe and timely reduction of the hazards and risks, while ensuring the site continues to meet its legal obligations.

"Sellafield Ltd has made significant progress in key decommissioning projects in recent years and we will continue to work constructively with the site and relevant stakeholders, to ensure Sellafield Ltd maintains this momentum while taking advantage of technological advantages."

