

ANOTHER PREVENTABLE INCIDENT

– ONE WITH DIRE CONSEQUENCES



A tragic workplace incident which left a 16-year-old girl paraplegic has shone a spotlight on the importance of assessing worker capabilities in a safe and controlled environment.

Described by WorkSafe NZ as “incredibly preventable”, the 2019 incident saw the teen thrown from a bolting racehorse, after being asked to ride it on her first day in a new job. The employer had intended to put the teen through an induction, they hadn’t quite got round to it. No assessment was undertaken to check if she had the skills to ride a racing-fit racehorse, and nor was she provided with the correct PPE (including helmet and safety vest). As WorkSafe Area Investigation Manager Steve Kelly explains, the consequences were life changing.

“If this company had taken reasonably practicable steps to ensure that qualified and competent individuals had assessed the capability and competency of the rider and ensured the rider was correctly fitted with appropriate PPE, this may never have happened,” he says.

“There has clearly been a lack of planning and forethought given to the hazards and risks of a new worker undertaking track work riding, which has led to an incredibly tragic, and incredibly preventable incident.”

Not surprisingly, this employer faced some serious charges and in February this year they were sentenced under sections 36(1)(a), 48(1) and 48 (2)(c) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015. These sections hone-in on the duties and responsibilities of a PCBU, which include ensuring - so far as reasonably practicable - the health and safety of workers while they’re at work. In this case, failing in that duty exposed the teen to serious injury, a charge which can be accompanied by a fine of up to \$1.5 million. Although no fine was imposed due to financial capacity, they were still ordered to pay over \$317,000 in reparations, and costs of \$14,500 to WorkSafe.

Talk to Nicholas Matzopoulos - National Training Director at Safety 'n Action – and his frustration is palpable.

“This was such an unnecessary tragedy for a young girl with her whole life ahead of her,” he says. “There are simple measures this employer could have undertaken that would have significantly minimised the risk.”

As New Zealand’s leading workplace health and safety training provider, Safety 'n Action has a stable of relevant training programmes, all expertly designed to keep workers safe.

According to Nicholas, the Board and Management Seminar would have been an ideal starting point.

<https://www.safetynaction.co.nz/en/our-courses/course-catalogue/health-and-safety-board-management-seminar/>

The interactive four-hour seminar gives attendees a clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities of an organisation’s Board and management teams, and includes real-life case studies and the chance to discuss issues and solutions specific to an attendee’s workplace.

“If this organisations management team had completed this programme, they would have understood the need for their people to complete Health and Safety Rep training as well as Hazard and Risk Management training,” explains Nicholas.

Safety 'n Action delivers outstanding courses in both these areas.

Their full-day Health and Safety Rep (HSR) programme equips HSR’s with the knowledge and skills they need to address worker issues and meet their responsibilities.

<https://www.safetynaction.co.nz/en/our-courses/course-catalogue/health-and-safety-representative-initial/>

Meanwhile Safety 'n Action’s Hazard and Risk Management training teaches workers to identify and manage risk within the workplace – and ultimately prevent potential illness, injury or incidents. <https://www.safetynaction.co.nz/en/our-courses/course-catalogue/hazard-and-risk-management/>

Ensuring boards, management and workers are given all the appropriate and approved training gives employers and their employees confidence and peace of mind.

Adds Nicholas, “Safety 'n Action courses not only teach you what’s expected of you, but they also equip you with the tools and know-how to keep your workplaces safe. As this Blackadder Racing case has so clearly shown, the stakes are too high to not take advantage of them.”