

## CASE STUDY: WORKER KILLED BY RUNAWAY LORRY



### **Summary**

A logistics company were prosecuted after a runaway lorry killed one of their drivers.

The 44 year-old worker, had just started his night shift when the incident occurred. He was crushed against a stationary vehicle when his own vehicle moved off while he was coupling the tractor unit to the trailer.

As he coupled up the airlines between his tractor and the trailer unit the air would have filled the trailer air reservoirs (as the engine was running) which would have released the pneumatic brakes.

Either the mechanical trailer brake was not engaged or the employee disengaged it.

The consequences of not applying the parking brake were aggravated by the steepness of the slope.

He died at the scene from a serious chest injury.

After striking him the lorry continued to roll down a slope, travelling another 27 metres before crashing into a wall. Had it not been stopped by the wall it may have rolled directly out onto a public highway.

The HSE investigation identified issues with the company's drivers coupling up vehicles without following the company's rules. They were not applying the handbrake to the tractor unit or turning off the engine.

This dangerous practice was known to the company who failed to effectively monitor its employees and ensure they followed the correct, safe working procedure. It was also found that there were no appropriate measures in place to prevent vehicles parked on the slope from rolling away, such as flattening it out, installing road bumps in front of the vehicle wheels, or using chocks.

### **Action**

The company pleaded guilty to breaching Sections 2(1) and 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. They were fined a total of £300,000 and also ordered to pay costs of £26,000.

### **Advice**

After the hearing the HSE inspector said: "This death was entirely preventable and the worker's life has needlessly been lost." "It happened because of a poor and dangerous practice that the company was aware of but did nothing to stop. Appropriate controls should also have been in place to ensure vehicles did not roll away. "What is so disappointing is that there had been previous similar incidents at this company and at the same site. Lessons should have been learned from these but were not."