

Labour department acts against Queenstown factory where worker's hand was severed

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The Department of Employment and Labour has taken action against Queenstown food company Truda Foods where a worker's hand was severed by a machine last week.



Eugene Jali's hand was severed in a maize mixing machine.

Eastern Cape Department of Employment and Labour provincial communication officer Ziphazile Josefu said inspectors had visited Truda Foods on 15 January, soon after the accident in which Eugene Jali lost his hand while working on a maize mixing machine. Jali's lower arm was later amputated at a local hospital.

"An Occupational Health and Safety inspection was conducted on 15 January and found a lack of supervision and a contravention notice was issued to that effect," said Josefu.

According to the South African Labour Guide, a contravention notice is served when a provision or a regulation under the Act is contravened. A contravention of the Act can result in immediate prosecution, but in the case of a contravention of a regulation, the employer may be given the opportunity to correct the contravention within a time limit specified in the notice which is usually 60 days. Josefu did not give details of the contravention.

She said the department had told the company to review its risk assessment process to ensure that revised safety measures are put in place.

Josefu said, "The company is also requested to advance precautionary measures of the machine and to ensure that workers are inducted before operating the machines."

She said the department had received the first medical report and was assessing and determining compensation for the employee.

The South African Security and Allied Workers Union, SASWU, has accused Truda Foods of exposing workers to poor safety conditions. SASWU claims that Jali was not trained to use the machine and that the company does not offer its workers sufficient protective clothing.

Truda Foods manufactures a range of maize snacks, soy mince and porridge.

SASWU General Secretary Xolile Mashukuca said in a statement, "The provision of personal protective gear is the key element of safety in the workplace. It is the duty of every employer to provide workers with it and clearly Eugene Jali was not provided with it by his employer, Truda Foods."

"Training of persons using machinery is mandatory for every employer. Jali had no training whatsoever on the use of the machine that chopped off his hand and this makes Truda Foods guilty in terms of section 37(1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1994."

CEO of Truda Foods Colin van Heerden denied this. "The claims of these discredited people are completely false," he said. He said his company complied with occupational health regulations. He blamed Jali for the accident.

"The machine in question has two power overrides. Both were functioning properly. It would appear that Mr Jali undid the latch and inserted his hand into the machine," said Van Heerden.

Van Heerden said Jali had worked for more than a year on the machine and was aware of the safety features on it. He explained: "His job does not require him to put his hand into the machine. In fact he has been told many times that he must not put his hand into the machine."

Van Heerden said Truda Foods had paid for private healthcare for Jali. He said the company would file an Injury On Duty claim and would hold a detailed enquiry into the accident.