

Health & Safety – Truck Tail Lift Accident

The Accident

Sunday 16 Feb 2014, at about 1030 am on Richmond Road, in Auckland's Grey Lynn, a 58 year old courier truck driver with 40 years experience as a truck driver was completing a pick up from NZ Post. The driver believed he had lifted up the tail lift of his truck but it was in the down position...

As he moved the truck forward a young woman jogging past went behind the truck; not knowing the tail lift was down and that the woman had gone behind his vehicle the truck driver commenced a right turn. The effect of the tail swing with the tail lift down resulted in the woman being caught between the tail lift and a wall, crushing her leg.

The right leg of the Grey Lynn mother of two was almost severed and was later amputated below the knee; she also received a compound fracture of her thigh which had to be repaired with a titanium rod and nails.

At Court

Later at the Auckland District Court the judge said that the woman had been seriously affected by the accident and had on-going pain and phantom pain from her amputated leg, and was also emotionally affected and could not get the sight of her severed leg out of her head. The accident had shaken her confidence and she was reluctant to go out as she was conscious of how she looked.

After pleading guilty to one charge of careless use of a vehicle causing injury, the driver was sentenced and ordered to pay emotional harm reparation of \$6000 to the victim and was fined \$250 and disqualified from driving for six months.

The Driver

The driver told the court he had used a remote control to raise the tail lift and its light had flashed as it normally did when it was working. He did not know why the tail lift did not raise. A police prosecutor said the tail lift had been examined and it worked properly with all the devices that raised and lowered it. The driver had been suspended from his job and was unlikely to get his position back.

The Employer

No charges were entered against the driver's employer as his company records confirmed he had conducted training on 17 Jun 2013 for all his staff well prior to the accident on the safe operation of the tail lift; and as a matter of routine conducted induction and re-induction training for all staff. Records of monthly health and safety meetings also contained reference to tail lifts being a workplace hazard and that care must be taken in their operation.

The operator has since changed their protocols on the operation of remote controls for tail lifts. Now drivers can use them only while watching the operation from the rear of their vehicles.