

fack families against corporate killers

Andrew Michael Hutin, 20 years old killed on 8th November 2001 at Corus, Port Talbot, South Wales.

By Michael Royston Hutin, father.

The 8th November 2001 is a date that my family will remember for the rest of our lives, for it was on this day we were robbed of our only son and, our daughter's only brother, Andrew was 20 years old and had so much to live for.

This was not Andrew's planned workday; he was told that he had to cover for a colleague who had been injured in a road traffic accident or face disciplinary action. The day passed as any normal uneventful day, until that is, I received a telephone call at around 5.30 pm. The conversation ended with me being asked the question 'what has happened on No. 5 Blast Furnace, I've been told there's been an explosion'. - At times, especially when I'm alone, those words echo in my head!

There had been rumours for quite some time that No. 5 furnace was in a very poor condition, there had been water sprays positioned around the shell in many places to keep the furnace cool. There had been a box section welded around the lap joint (the area where the furnace is bolted together) to prevent the gases from leaking out. But, as this was an old furnace, was this not to be expected, surely Corus would not take any chances with the lives of their workforce for financial / commercial reasons?

It took me many months talking to most of the men who were present that day, to piece together what happened. Indeed there is a contradiction between the facts as recalled by the blue collar workers, and the facts that the staff recalled, that is when the staff were able to actually remember anything at all! Although some had attended a meeting an hour before the explosion had occurred, they were unable to recall who was actually present, what was discussed and what conclusions were reached! Obviously they had been very badly affected by the experience!! The photographic evidence however, proved conclusively that the 'blue collar' workers were correct! However, as there were two main themes, and therefore, a contradiction, the Coroner using the current powers that he has, decided that the jury could only return the verdict of Accidental Death. Four Weeks for what a total 'whitewash'! - British Justice?

The HSE has subsequently charged Corus on two counts;

- (1) That Corus did not ensure, so far as was reasonably practicable, the safety of its employees in connection with the operation of No.5 blast furnace
- (2) That Corus did not ensure that the furnace was operated in such a way as to ensure that contractors were not exposed to risks.

The prosecution date has been set for the 14th December 2006; this is the third date that we have been given, and it is after the fifth anniversary!

There is little doubt in my mind, that Corus should have be prosecuted for the disgraceful condition that No.5 furnace was in, and secondly the persons who made the decisions that day should face the consequences of those decisions!

What has happened however leaves my family totally disgusted, no individual has been penalised in any way. Some have been rewarded with early retirement; others have been promoted, the remainder are still in supervisory positions! Almost all are waiting to receive compensation payments for the trauma that they suffered!!!

I have been informed that the largest fine imposed on any company is £15M. Corus has received £75M from its insurers, which paid in full for a new blast furnace, opened with huge amount of national publicity by Prince Charles.

Could someone therefore inform me, because I am obviously missing something here, who has been penalised? What incentives are there for individuals or large companies to comply with Health and Safety legislation, if the financial rewards for ignoring the legislation, is more beneficial? If there is no penalty only reward how are we to improve the Health and Safety of every person working in this country?

Since 2001 at Corus Port Talbot, there have several further deaths at Corus sites across the country, some at Port Talbot. Have any lessons been learnt?

Corus has suffered, I have been informed, from the death of my son, my family see no evidence of that, we however, have suffered every single day since, is it too much to ask for the justice that Andrew deserves?

Michael Royston Hutin, father