

Date: 15 June 2011
Release No: HSE-e-26-11

Castle Point Borough Council has been prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) following an incident where a seven-year old girl was trapped by a water outlet at the Waterside Swimming Pool on Canvey Island.

On 2 May 2009, a seven-year old girl was using the swimming pool with her great grandfather at Waterside Farm Leisure Centre. Her hair was sucked into the water sampling outlet on the side of the pool, trapping her underwater for two minutes and 36 seconds. Her great grandfather had to pull a clump of hair from her head in order to free her. She was unconscious when she was finally taken out of the water, limp and blue in color, but came round once laid on the poolside.

HSE told Basildon Magistrates' Court today that Castle Point Borough Council, which owns and runs the swimming pool, had not managed the risks to members of the public using it. In particular the council failed to ensure that the sample outlet had two vents so if one became blocked the other vent would take the pressure off the suction. There were too few lifeguards on duty and of the two that were working, one was cleaning and the other could not see the whole pool due to the glare from sunlight reflecting on the water.

After the hearing, HSE Inspector Nicola Surrey said:

"This incident was extremely traumatic for the young girl and her great grandfather and it could have had far more serious consequences. Managed properly, swimming pools are a place for fun and exercise yet the council put pool users at risk of entrapment by not properly maintaining the water outlets."

Castle Point Borough Council from Kiln Road, Benfleet, Essex pleaded guilty to breaching section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £18,000 and ordered to pay costs of £7,500.

Notes to editors

1. The Health and Safety Executive is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. It aims to prevent death, injury and ill health. It does so through research, information and advice, promoting training, new or revised regulations and codes of practice, and working with local authority partners by inspection, investigation and enforcement. www.hse.gov.uk^[1]
2. Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 states: "It shall be the duty of every employer to conduct his undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in his employment who may be affected thereby are not thereby exposed to risks to their health or safety."

Press enquiries

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