



Media Release - SafeWork SA

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WHYALLA STEEL MAKER FINED OVER ARC FLASH INCIDENT

A prominent regional manufacturer has been convicted and fined by the Industrial Court today over an “ad hoc work method” that put an apprentice worker at risk of electrocution.

OneSteel Manufacturing Pty Ltd had already pleaded guilty to breaching section 19(1) of the *Occupational Health Safety and Welfare Act 1986* in failing to ensure the safety of an employee at work, and failing to provide a safe system of work.

SafeWork SA prosecuted after investigating an incident at the company’s Whyalla steelworks in July 2008. Two workers had been tasked with the thermal imaging of live switchboards. One was a qualified electrician and the other a 19 year old second year apprentice.

As the apprentice removed the cover of a switchboard during the course of this work, the cover swung free and came into contact with live electrical equipment. This caused the arcing of electricity with a resulting flash and blast. The young man was stunned by the force of the blast and suffered burns to his face and left hand. Fortunately these were minor, and he returned to full work duties within weeks, having suffered no lasting ill-effects.

Aside from the obvious risk of electrocution, SafeWork SA’s investigation revealed several shortcomings in the approach to this type of work:

- A failure to provide an adequate safe operating procedure for the task
- A failure to provide adequate instruction, information and training for the task
- A failure to ensure adequate personal protective equipment was worn for the task
- Additional hazards were created through having numerous switchboard panels open.

Despite evidence of strong general policies and procedures on electrical safety, Industrial Magistrate Stephen Lieschke described this work method as “ad hoc”:

“OneSteel’s offending resulted from a significant gap in an otherwise good safety system... OneSteel permitted the poorly planned thermal imaging work to be undertaken despite being aware there were a number of hazards associated with the task.”

He fined the company \$48,000 after a reduction of 20 per cent to acknowledge the company’s early plea, cooperation, contrition and effective remedial action in response to the incident.

SafeWork SA says the case again highlights the vulnerability of young workers where a safety system has not been thought out and implemented as far as reasonably practicable.

“The imperative is to also see that every possible source of harm is identified and managed, especially where electricity is involved,” says Acting Executive Director, Bryan Russell.