



NEWS

Quarry supervisor's 'tick and flick' safety approach



Connor Milne with his partner Shannea Farrier and their baby daughter Summer-Lee. Connor died in November 2018 at a quarry near Clermont.

THE tragic death of a young father at a Central Queensland quarry has highlighted concerning safety shortcuts a supervisor took a "tick and flick" approach at his induction assessment.

But Vincent Matthew David Fitzgerald says he was replicating the induction process he had been shown.

Magistrate James Morton said this "industry norm" approach showed "a flagrant disregard for the safety of its workers" and needed to be cleaned up.

Connor Milne was fatally crushed at Fairfield Quarry on November 15, 2018 when he became entangled in the rotating tail drum of a conveyor belt after three weeks on the job.

He was hired by Clermont Quarries Pty Ltd as a loader and excavator operator and during his first-day induction, on October 24, was required to complete a theoretical and practical assessment demonstrating his skills and proficiency on the equipment.

However his supervisor, Fitzgerald, failed to "genuinely" test his ability and knowledge.

Mackay Magistrates Court heard Mr Milne, 21, copied his theory answers from an answer sheet and Fitzgerald failed to observe him on the equipment for the practical assessment.

Fitzgerald, 25, pleaded guilty to failing to discharge a health and safety obligation.

The court heard the offending was not directly linked to Mr Milne's death but came to light as part of the investigation into the tragic incident - he was sacked by his employer following his record of interview with the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy.

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Connor Milne with his partner Shannea Farrier.

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Clermont Quarries Pty Ltd, site senior executive Darren Bruce Gregory and supervisor on the day of Mr Milne's death, Darren Bruce Gregory, have also been charged over the fatality. No pleas have been entered at this stage.

Defence barrister Scott McLennan said his client, who had been 23 at the time, had "been thrust into a supervisory role at a young age by a company who seemingly placed premium on production rather than safety".

Minutes taken during a safety management meeting held on November 6, 2018, and which were tendered in court, highlighted an overall review was needed "due to the high number of incidents".

"(A) major contributor is the quick growth of the company," Mr McLennan said.

The court heard other issues raised included a lack of "suitable supervisory staff" and "quarry managers and supervisors are spending time in production roles leaving little time to properly supervise and manage".

"This was a company which expanded too fast, it was placing huge production pressures on its staff, it had inexperienced supervisors including my 23 year old client," Mr McLennan said.

"(The) culture was ... learn on the job."

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"He was just doing what had happened with him," Mr McLennan said.

"The real issue is a cut and paste or tick and flick process was undertaken by your client," Magistrate James Morton said.

To Fitzgerald, Mr Morton said: "I've got no doubt ... this has been on your mind since the day of the event."

"I accept that you were thrown into the deep end ... I accept that you are a man of good character.

"You conducted what you thought at the time was the industry norm, tick and flick, cut and paste ... which is a sad aspect and the industry ought to be cleaned up (so) this ought not to happen again because it shows a flagrant disregard for the safety of its workers.

"Your co-operation is significant."

Fitzgerald was fined \$3000 and a conviction was not recorded. He was also ordered to pay \$1900 in costs.

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