

# HEALTH & SAFETY BULLETIN

## 201

### **CHILD LOOSES EIGHT FINGERS IN PLASTER OF PARIS BURN**

Giles School in Boston has been found guilty of breaching health and safety regulations following a serious injury to a pupil. The school has been ordered to pay a total of £19,000 in fines and costs after a 16-year-old girl lost eight fingers in a school art lesson in January 2007.

This incident was first brought to your attention in Health & Safety Bulletin 193.

It is believed the pupil was due to make a sculpture of her own hands and had been told by the teacher to put her hands into clay to make a mould. However, rather than placing her hands into the clay mould, the student put her hands into a bucket of plaster that was due to be poured into the mould. The plaster set around her hands and neither staff nor paramedics could remove it.

Temperatures up to 60°C can be generated in large quantities of plaster and the girl suffered severe burns as a result. Following a series of operations, only 2 of her fingers could be saved.

The Safety Data Sheet supplied with the product did warn against making casts of the hand but such warnings would not necessarily appear on samples intended for laboratory use. Plaster of Paris is of course used for setting fractured bones but in such cases it is never put in direct contact with the skin. In addition, it is used in relatively thin layers so the heat can dissipate.

Science and art departments sometimes use Plaster of Paris for making casts and if used carefully in accordance with a well prepared lesson plan this should not present a problem. However, students do need to be warned to avoid skin contact.

The foundation school's governing body pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and also failing to report the incident to the Health and Safety Executive under regulation 3(1)(c) of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR). The HSE eventually found out about the incident six weeks later from the plastic surgeon that treated the girl.

#### **Learning Points**

- It is a legal requirement that risk assessments are carried out for teaching activities involving the exposure to or handling of hazardous substances. COSHH assessment must be completed and read by teachers/technicians (see LCOP 6 and LCOP 19). It can be helpful to link the COSHH assessment to the lesson plan and ensure it is reviewed as part of any future lesson preparation.
- Class pupils must be told by their teacher/technician of the potential dangers of hazardous substances and control measures to be adopted e.g wear protective clothing and follow safe procedure (see LCOP 6).
- School teacher/technician have a duty to challenge class pupils that behave or act unsafely (see LCOP 6). If necessary reward safe practices and discipline unsafe acts.

- School Governing Bodies have a general duty to co-operate with the LA in meeting its legal duties (see Teachernet) to report and record accidents, diseases and dangerous occurrences arising out of activities within the control of the LA or Governing Body (see LCOP 4).
- It is important that Educational Establishments understand the requirements of RIDDOR and to report incidents as and when they occur, whether the incident happens to a student or a member of staff (see Corporate Arrangements Section 4 and LCOP 4)

**Further information**

LBB Policy for Health, Safety and Welfare Part C – Arrangements Section 4 Accident and Incident Reporting

LCOP 4 – Reporting Accidents Injuries Dangerous Occurrences

LCOP 6 - Control of Hazardous Explosive Dangerous Substances

LCOP 19 - Management of Health & Safety at Work (General Risk Assessment)

Teachernet - Responsibilities & Powers:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthandsafety/responsibilities/>