

No charges over Waikari quarry death

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WorkSafe New Zealand will not be laying charges over the death of Canterbury man Murray Taylor, who was crushed in June last year when the limestone quarry face he was working on collapsed.

WorkSafe has now finished its investigation into Mr Taylor's death. While it concluded that the Health and Safety in Employment Act had been breached, it was decided prosecution was not in the public interest as Mr Taylor was the sole director of the company in charge of the quarry work, Heathstock Haulage Ltd.

Mr Taylor died in June when about 1000 tonnes of sandstone rock fell from the quarry wall, burying the 65-tonne 'Cat' excavator he was operating at the time. The rock face had been undermined and was unstable as a result of Mr Taylor's excavation work.

WorkSafe's Chief Inspector of Investigations Keith Stewart says Mr Taylor was operating the excavator directly under the face of the wall when it collapsed. The excavator's cab was crushed instantly.

"Quarry work is inherently risky unless it is done correctly. In this case no geotechnical assessment had been carried out to determine the nature of the rock wall. That would have helped identify the safest way to tackle excavation work. There was also no evidence procedures were in place to ensure that staff were adequately trained, monitored and supervised.

"As has been noted previously, Mr Taylor did not hold the Certificate of Competence that is legally required for the sort of quarry work he was undertaking. Merely holding a Certificate might not have prevented this incident - but to obtain one he would have had to prove he had the required knowledge and skills which could have been applied to this work.

"Any workplace death is a tragedy for family, friends and colleagues but hopefully the publicity surrounding Mr Taylor's death will prompt quarry operators to check that their Certificates are current and their practices are safe.

"Despite the conclusion that the health and safety law was breached there would be nothing to be gained from laying charges against Mr Taylor's company," says Keith Stewart.