

Vet practice fined after workers put at risk of exposure to harmful chemo drugs

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Categories : [General News](#)

Date : October 27, 2014

A veterinary company has been fined after workers were potentially exposed to harmful substances found in animal chemotherapy drugs prepared at the practice over a four-year period.



Employees of **Davies Veterinary Specialists**, including vets, nurses and support staff, were potentially exposed to the drugs as they prepared medicines to treat animals with cancer at the firm's premises at Manor Farm Business Park in Higham Gobion, Bedfordshire.

The company was prosecuted by the **Health and Safety Executive** (HSE) after it emerged the fume cabinet used for **animal chemotherapy drug preparation** was not used in the way it was designed.

This meant employees had potentially been exposed to substances harmful to human health and can cause **cancer**.

Last week (October 23) at Luton Crown Court the company **pleaded guilty** to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. It was **fined £35,000** and ordered to pay **£50,378 in costs**.

The court heard a dangerous occurrence was reported to HSE in **September 2011** after one of the vets believed the fume cabinet was unsuitable.

The investigation also found there was no system in place to **prevent or reduce the risk of exposure to employees**, that there had been no maintenance of the fume cupboard for many years and the cleaning procedures were inadequate.

Staff had not been given any safety training in the safe use of the fume cupboard, and there was **inadequate personal protective equipment** and no monitoring systems.

This meant staff could have been exposed to the potentially harmful drugs from **July 2007 to September 2011**.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector **Emma Page** said: "The chemotherapy drugs used to treat cancer in animals can cause cancer in humans and harm unborn babies.

"The company had no arrangements in place to ensure employees could **work safely** when preparing these drugs.

"About 125 people work at the practice of which a small number would have been at **risk of developing cancer**.

"**Simple measures**, such as an appropriately designed, maintained and serviced fume cabinet, protective equipment adequate cleaning procedures and proper training, would have prevented exposure."