

ICL INQUIRY STATEMENT

JAMES ANDREW BAXTER

Start of Employment

1. In March 2002 I started my employment with Stockline Plastics as a machine operator/storeman.

Title and Duties

2. My duties were to cut sheets of plastic to the specific sizes ordered by the companies. I worked in the Stockline building.

Machinery

3. The machines that I used were three saws, routers and drills for shaping materials. All the machines that I used were electric.
4. There is a wall clock near to my machine and I was watching it that day when it got near to twelve o'clock (1200 hrs, about 5 past 12 (1205 hrs)). I was standing with my back to the roller door (which was open) facing my machine when I heard a loud bang which was a similar sound to the claps of thunder which I heard on Monday 10th May 2004 (10/05/2004), but the bang was more intense, a lot louder.
5. The bang I heard coming from behind to my right which is in the general direction of the I.C.L.Tech Building. It sounded as if it was right above and to the right of my head. It sounded as if it came from above and then down the way onto the same level as me. The sounds of thunder I referred to previously were the thunder storms the day previously. There was a storm which had thunder and lightning and torrential rain. I don't remember water coming into the factory even during this storm.

6. I turned round at that time so I was facing the roller shutter door (open) and I felt the blast of air which was dusty. This basically washed over me.
7. I was uninjured and I didn't smell any toxic fumes.
8. The rush of dusty air was not hot air.
9. I left the building via the main roller door in Grovepark Street. After the roll call I ran to the main iron front gates of ICL Technical Plastics. As I reached those gates on the outside I met a guy called Jimmy, who works for ICL Tech as an oven operator.
10. Jimmy recognised me and I approached him and asked him how to switch of the large butane gas cylinder which was behind the gate.
11. I asked Jimmy this 'cause I could hear it hissing. Jimmy said that it is normal operation for it to hiss but told me to switch it off anyway.
12. I went to the cylinder and closed the valve in case of leakage.
13. I have marked a cross at that tank. **[The Inquiry have been unable to locate this diagram]** The cylinder was green/grey in colour. I had never worked that tank before. I have no idea what the gas feeds. Jim McGoldrick pointed to the valve and told me to pull the valve up, which I did. Jimmy was shaking and looked too upset to do it himself. I could not smell any gas from it.
14. The hissing ceased and I didn't smell any gas. By that time I heard the sirens of the emergency services and so I went back round to my designated fire point in Grovepark Street and waited there for about ½ hour and then two ambulance workers sent us round to near the Lidl car park where there was an emergency tent and a police woman noted my details.

15. I don't have any knowledge of the I.C.L. Technical Building that could assist you.

16. I have no concerns over safety there.

17. My saw machine is worked off compressed air. The air is supplied from the compressed air machine in I.C.L. Techs, the machine (compressor) is in the coating shop area on the ground floor of the I.C.L. Tech Building.

18. I don't know what caused the explosion or why the building collapsed.

Smells

19. I did not notice any unusual smells or anything unusual in the weeks or months leading up to the tragedy.

20. The normal smell in our factory would depend on what job we had that day. It could be the smell of plastics going through the saws. This would be the main smell. If we had to clean anything I would just blow it with the airline. The air comes from the main compressor in the Tech building via plastic pipes which fed our machines. A new piece of pipe was inserted by someone. It may have been Jim Smith who I think was responsible for the airlines. This was over a year ago. I'm not sure of the exact date.

21. Jim Smith kept a maintenance book in our building (the office) which recorded defects and repairs.

22. We also had a record of machines maintenance which is updated weekly. These records are kept on the shelf at the trade counter office.

23. The only modification I remember was to the compressor system, an auxiliary system was installed in the factory. This consisted of three

compressors which were stored in the rear room of the Stockline building. I think each compressor fed two airlines which would provide 2 auxiliary plug in points for each machine. This was installed in the last year by Kenny and maybe Andy. Kenny certainly did most of the work.

24. These pipes were all grey in colour. This would allow us to work independently of the Tech building either if we worked late on or at weekends. I don't recall any major or minor modifications to the building during the time I was there. The only machinery that was bought was the forklifts.

25. About one year ago we got rid of the diesel forklift and bought an additional gas forklift. There were already two gas powered forklifts in the Tech building. These are run off orange gas bottles which are strapped to the back of each forklift. These gas bottles were stored externally in a metal cage in the ICL Tech yard. The operator would be responsible for changing the bottle as required.

26. The maximum lifting capacity for our forklift would be about 1.8 tonnes. The only repair I recall is when Andy was in the back yard on a cherry picker. I have no idea why he was there, it could have been cosmetic. Nobody ever told me. This was about 3 December 2003 (03/12/2003). I remember this because I sat my forklift test that day.

Health and Safety

27. I had no concerns about the health and safety of the premises.

28. In my opinion the health and safety was a lot better than most places that I have worked. I remember that everything had to be tidied away and that you would be pulled up for leaving things out. There was areas that were painted green and black and these were to be left clear. I know people who got warnings but I don't know what for, it could have been for health and safety issues. I kept a record of the

machines that I used and how often they were serviced and cleaned up. They were cleaned up and checked they were in working order by the operator every week and they were serviced every 6 months.

29. I was asked about me entering the building to switch off the gas.

30. I recall entering the Stockline Building and switching the gas meter off in there. This meter was located just inside the small public entrance to the Stockline building. The meter was in a small cupboard at the back of the male toilets.

31. At that time I was with my gaffer Robert Warren and a Fire Officer. It was only the three of us. I turned the lever at the gas meter in the opposite way from the position that it was at, which I presumed switched it off. Robert was standing watching. It was only the one lever that I turned.

I confirm that the contents of this statement are true.

Witness signature _____

Date _____

James Baxter

1. Paragraphs 11 - 14 You discuss "hissing" from a gas cylinder. Can you explain in more detail why it was considered to be a "normal operation" (para 11) for the cylinder to hiss?

No I cannot. I had never seen a tank like that before, or used or operated one. I did not know whether it was LPG, natural gas or anything, so I am unable to say whether the hissing was a normal operation or not.

I cannot remember whether the hissing was very loud or not, I suppose it was like a tyre going down but I could not be certain.

2. Paragraphs 9 - 13 You refer to a "Jimmy". Are you referring to Jim McGoldrick here? If not, do you know the full name of this person?

Yes I am referring to Jim McGoldrick.

I confirm that the contents of this statement are true.

Witness signature _____

Date _____