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## Machine kills female worker five days after employment

February 7, 2012 by Simon Utebor [48 Comments](#)



Barely five days after she was employed, Miss [Happiness Okon](#), a machine operator at [IMPCO Company Limited](#) on Fatai Atere Road, Mushin, Lagos, has been killed by the firm's plastic moulding machine.

The 21-year-old girl came to Lagos in the last quarter of 2011 to work to raise money to pursue her long time [ambition of studying Theatre Arts at university](#).

But her ambition was cut short when on January 23, 2012, Okon went to work but never returned. She was allegedly killed by the company's moulding machine.

Her death on the fateful day has led to a dispute between the family and the company.

The family insisted that the company was economical with the truth about the real cause of the girl's death.

The girl's uncle, Mr. Effiong Nyah, told *Metro* that there was no iota of truth in the company's claim that the girl walked into a machine and died in the process.

He said the way the company concealed the death from members of the family and their failure to allow them to check the machine which allegedly killed Okon made them to believe the company was culpable.

Nyah said, "I received a call from one of my brothers that Happiness (Okon) was dead and that a machine killed her. When I got to the company, I was not allowed into the premises even when I told them I was the guardian of the girl.

"After some time, a person who identified himself as the Personnel Manager came and said the company was sorry for what happened. I then asked him to allow me to see her corpse at least, he shouted at me, 'to see what; to see what? It was then I knew something was amiss. I kept silent.

"Not long, a man came and introduced himself as a policeman. He came along with a photographer. Still, they did not allow me to go in with them. After some time, the policeman came out with the photographer. He now asked me to come with them to the office. When we got there, he showed me an industrial machine and said it was the machine that killed Happiness (Okon).

"I was stunned as there was no blood stain on it. I turned the machine around, no sign that anything happened there. I became suspicious and asked them to start the machine to know how it operates since I am a machine operator myself but they refused.

"Reluctantly, they took me to a hospital where her corpse had been taken to. When we got there, I saw that her head was broken and the skull came out. I broke down in tears. As I was crying, I was called outside to sign some papers to enable them to take her corpse to the mortuary. I signed all the papers. After signing the documents, the policeman told me the company had agreed to take care of the burial expenses but that the police asked them to wait until they finished their investigation."

Nyah said from the officials' body language, he was convinced that the company had hand in the death of the girl.

He said another reason for his suspicion was that he learnt that many staff had died in similar circumstances in the past and the matter was usually covered up.

But IMPCO, through its lawyers, Abel O. Osuji & Associates, said the girl died, when out of curiosity, she opened a blow-moulding machine, entered into it and the machine suddenly closed upon her head and severely injured her.

The Managing Partner, Abel Osuji & Associates, Abel Osuji, said the late Okon was a casual worker (packer) not a machine operator or technician.

Osuji said when the incident occurred the inbuilt alarm of the machine alerted other members of staff.

He said when other workers came, they found the deceased barely breathing, with head injuries in a pool of blood.

Osuji said the workers immediately alerted senior members of staff and Okon was rushed to a nearby hospital in Papa Ajao but she was certified dead at the hospital.

The letter by the company's lawyer to the family's lawyer, a copy of which is made available to our correspondent, reads in part, "Our client is aware of the danger posed by the machines to persons, and the costly damage that would be caused to the machines themselves if operated by novices. It is therefore inconceivable that our client would have assigned your client to operate the machine; especially when our client has well trained, qualified and experienced machine operators and technicians in its employ.

“Obviously, it would not be of any profit for our client to allow any of its members of staff to be killed. The incident is considered a grave loss to the company, also considering its effect on the staff morale and the image of the company. In fact, the company closed its operations for a day to observe a day of mourning in her honour.

“Note that our client has nothing to hide in this matter and has been taking all steps required by law. Our client made an immediate report to the nearest police station as they are required to. It is up to the police to transfer the case to any station or department they deem appropriate.”

However, the lawyer to the family of the deceased, Mr. Silas Udoh, said the reasons given by the company that the late Okon roamed into the machine were untenable.

Udoh said the company was culpable for assigning her a duty of machine operator when she had not been trained for such.

He also said it was illogical to believe that a worker who was barely five days old in the company was the only one left to operate a machine of the magnitude without supervisors, wondering where other workers were when she was trapped by the machine as claimed.

Silas said, “Our position in law is that we are not satisfied with the company’s report. We are highly embarrassed by the IMPCO lawyer’s use of the word ‘casual worker.’ That is the reason the company should be more liable. When life is involved, such a language is not supposed to arise whatsoever because it is clear in the 1999 Constitution that everybody resident in Nigeria has a right to life.

“The constitution does not categorise that life belongs to the rich or permanent worker. We are calling on the relevant authorities – the police, the Attorney-General of Lagos State to investigate the case, more so when the lady is the first child of the family.”

He, therefore, demanded the immediate prosecution of all the people allegedly involved in Okon’s death.

He said his firm would be suing for N200m compensation for the family.

Silas wondered why such a serious issue should be reported at a police station in Mushin, which the company knew was not competent to handle a murder case.

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