



Spirit of health and safety

Prosecution of several parties following an explosion at an industrial coolstore in the Waikato should ring alarm bells for liquor store retailers and building owners.

The coolstore company has pleaded guilty today to charges arising from the explosion last year that left one firefighter dead and seven others injured.

Fire crews attending the blaze at Tamahere were unaware that highly flammable substances were present.

The prosecution by the Department of Labour is particularly relevant to liquor retailers who offer "fill-your-own" spirits facilities ie bulk spirits that contain more than 15% alcohol by volume (abv).

"Inadequate signage or a lack of understanding of the full responsibilities by retailers and building owners could create a similar hazard for emergency services," says Thomas Chin, Chief Executive of the Distilled Spirits Association

Usually, bulk spirits are stored in 20 litre plastic cubes on racks or in other bulk tanks for the refilling of containers. Where this is so, both building owners and licensees need to fully understand their obligations under the Hazardous Substances and New Organism (HSNO) Act and other legislation.

"On no account should bulk alcohol be stored, handled or dispensed unless there is full compliance with the Act and there are adequate fire control systems, qualified staff and proper labeling in place," Mr Chin says.

"Any degree of non-compliance creates potential dangers for staff and customers and a financial penalty for building owners whose insurance could be invalidated in any incident."

The Association, which represents New Zealand's leading brand owners, importers and exporters of premium spirits, urges all liquor store staff involved in bulk alcohol dispensing and sales to adhere strictly to the safety practices set out in the Act - so as to avoid another tragedy, Mr Chin says.

For further information contact:

Thomas Chin

Chief Executive

Distilled Spirits Association of New Zealand

09 300 5930

tchin@distillers.co.nz

Editor's note:

The HSNO Act and its regulations are enforced by the Labour Department and territorial authorities. They require that bulk alcohol beverages stored in containers of more than 5 litres capacity be:

- In premises that have a location test certificate
- In premises that have a hazardous substance location area and this be notified to an enforcement officer
- Under the control of an individual who is a certified "approved handler"
- Protected with appropriate fire extinguishers and
- That the "Highly Flammable Substance" warning is properly affixed to containers.

The HSNO Act carries maximum penalties of fines of up to \$500,000 or a term of 3 months jail for failure to comply with regulatory controls.

The HSNO Alcoholic Beverages Standard has been in effect since July 2006 and does not apply to single bottles.