

Family of John Fernandes stevedore dissatisfied with company's handling of death

January 18, 2025 By Shuntel Glasgow

The family of Dallas Sharples, who died at the John Fernandes wharf in Georgetown on Thursday afternoon, have expressed their displeasure at the way in which executives of the company have handled the matter so far and are demanding answers.

Wayne Sharples, the 65-year-old brother of Dallas, told Stabroek News yesterday that the family had a brief meeting with executives of John Fernandes Limited and are dissatisfied with the information provided thus far.

The family visited the site on Thursday afternoon and met with the director, who outlined the principles of the company. They were told that Dallas operated a machine that moves containers to different parts of the compound. At the time of the incident, he was situated in an enclosed place and was attempting to remove a container from a vessel. However, the chain that is attached to the machine became tangled and he tried to unravel it from his operational space. Dallas successfully unravelled the chain and after the tension was released, it slammed into his chest. The enclosed space which Dallas operated from provided protection from the waist down. After the chain struck Dallas in the chest, he fell into the hatch.

On Thursday afternoon, Stabroek News visited the John Fernandes wharf for a comment from company officials. However, the effort was met with a lack of response. Upon arrival, the supervisor at the checkpoint endeavoured to contact someone who could provide the necessary information, but unfortunately, further communications failed.

According to Wayne, his brother had a common-law relationship with a woman who migrated years ago and they had subsequently separated. Before the separation, she was listed as his beneficiary. As such the family was informed that Dallas' benefits from his years of service can only be accessed by the woman. However, the family's view is

that Dallas died under unfortunate circumstances at the company's premises and that they should be compensated.

The company, meanwhile, has promised to facilitate the funeral arrangements. Wayne also disclosed that Dallas served the company for 18 years and was a supervisor.

According to Wayne, his brother died on the worksite and John Fernandes should therefore compensate the family. He questioned whether 18 years of service was worth his brother's life, and accused the company of treating his brother's death as just another incident, notwithstanding his years of service.

Wayne feels strongly that the current system is flawed, as it fails to adequately address workplace fatalities. In his view, if someone dies on the job, there should be consequences for the company involved. Moreover, he believes that some form of support or compensation should be offered to the grieving family.

"I feel to myself that the system that they have is bad because if somebody die at the workplace there have to be some consequences that the company will suffer. Also, there must be something that is being offered to the family. They should be held liable for this because he died on the job. We going through our pain. I feel that a company so big like that should have a better system in place to provide more answers."

The family voiced dissatisfaction with the company's response to the incident and the lack of proper support to the family. They also have more questions than answers.

"We are not satisfied. What are they being held liable for as it relates to somebody losing their life at the company on the job? They are a powerful company so they think they can boycott you behind closed doors but we don't feel it is fair. A man who worked for 18 years there and that's how they treating him. The family should get compensation from the company. He died doing your duties, serving the company. The man was serious with his work."

Dallas was described as a jovial person and dedicated to his job.

Wayne reflected on the tragic incidents at John Fernandes Wharf, where several lives have been lost, leaving families without compensation or solace and stated that this should come to an end.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour's Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Department has launched a probe into the fatal incident.

In a statement on Thursday, the Ministry said that reports indicated that Sharples was working with his colleagues to offload containers from the vessel MV JPO Aquila when the incident took place.

In response to the incident, Senior OSH Officer Garraway Bourne and OSH Officer Ray Hosannah, promptly visited the site to commence a thorough investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the accident and to develop recommendations to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

The death comes amid a surge of fatal industrial accidents. Thirty-two persons died at workplaces last year, reflecting a 45.4 per cent increase compared to 2023, the Labour Ministry disclosed recently.

The first fatality of the year occurred on Wednesday, January 8, at the New Demerara River Bridge, West Bank Demerara. The victim, 39-year-old Fu-Jian Wei, a Chinese national employed as a rigger by the China Railway Construction Corporation, tragically lost his life in the incident.

In February 2024, 64-year-old Trevor Jones, a stevedore foreman at John Fernandes Limited Port Facility on Water Street, was walking behind a super reach stacker as it was reversing. He was struck by the counterweight at the rear of the vehicle, at which point he fell to the side and was fatally injured by the rear right wheel of the machine.