

Criminal Charges Brought in UCLA Death



Canada isn't the only country in which criminal charges can be brought for serious workplace safety incidents. Such charges were recently filed against a US university professor in connection with the death of a staff research associate.

The Los Angeles District Attorney's Office has charged a UCLA chemistry professor, Prof. Patrick Harran, and the school's regents with three counts of wilfully violating California OHS laws in connection with the death of Sheharbano "Sherri" Sangji, who suffered extensive burns when chemicals burst into flame. She died in the hospital 18 days later.

The charges claim that Harran and the university failed to correct unsafe working conditions in a timely manner, didn't require appropriate PPE for the work being done and failed to provide proper chemical safety training.

If convicted, the university faces up to \$4.5 million in fines and Harran faces up to four and a half years in jail. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, an arrest warrant has been issued for Harran.

The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) investigated Sangji's death and found that she hadn't been properly trained and should have been using protective clothing. The safety agency fined the university \$31,875.

UCLA issued a statement calling the charges “outrageous” and noting that it will mount a vigorous defence against them. The statement says that the Cal/OSHA investigation found no wilful violations on the university’s part, adding that UCLA has fully cooperated with both Cal/OSHA and the DA’s office.

UCLA also says it has dramatically increased laboratory inspections and set more rigorous safety standards since the fatality occurred.

Canadian Criminal Charges

In Canada, passage of C-45 made it easier to charge companies and individuals with criminal negligence for serious safety incidents. But very few such charges have been brought—and some of those that have been brought have subsequently been dismissed. (For more information on C-45, go to the [C-45 Compliance Center](#).)

Do you think criminal charges should be brought for serious safety incidents more often? Tell us what you think in the comments section below.