



R B F & R S

news release

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NOODLE BAR OWNER FINED FOR SERIOUS FIRE SAFETY BREACHES

The joint proprietor of the Hong Kong and Beijing Noodle Bar (13 and 14 West Street Reading), Mrs Genevieve Chan, was prosecuted at Reading Magistrates Court on 3 September for failure to comply with fire safety regulations. A second defendant and joint owner of the premises failed to appear to answer charges.

Mrs Chan had pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing on 16 July 2009 to 13 separate charges of placing persons at serious risk of death or serious injury from fire. The charges related to failure to comply with fire safety regulations contained within the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

The prosecution was brought following a fire in the premises on 1 May 2008, which took 65 firefighters several hours to bring under control. Fire safety officers found that the premises were being used for sleeping accommodation in addition to the provision of a restaurant and take-away.

The premises of both 13 and 14 West Street comprised of a basement, ground, first and second floors. Magistrates heard that, with the exception of two single point fire detectors, the premises had no fire alarms, inadequate emergency lighting, inadequate fire protection measures provided for the basement and inadequate escape routes from the upper floors. In addition, it was found that fire exit doors were locked and bolted, there was no fire risk assessment in place, staff had been given no fire safety training, and corridors were obstructed with combustible storage.

Mrs Chan was fined £2,500 for each offence, a total of £32,500, and also ordered to pay full prosecution costs of £8,619, resulting in a total liability of £41,134 (including a £15 victim surcharge). Mrs Chan was awarded time to pay the fine and faces up to six months in prison if she fails to do so.

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David Walden, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service Fire Safety Technical Support Manager, said: "We welcome the clear message sent out by the Court that business owners will be held accountable in law for the fire-related safety of staff and customers on their premises. The fire at this property was serious and could all too easily have resulted in the deaths of several people.

"Although fire and rescue services are no longer required to issue fire safety certificates, we continue to carry out a rigorous inspection programme of commercial premises to ensure they are meeting the standards required by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Everyone who employs staff or has responsibility and control of commercial premises must ensure that they meet the responsibilities placed upon them by the Order. The Fire Authority has a statutory duty to enforce Fire Safety regulations and thereby protect the public."

ENDS.