

Moving company fined over electrocution of farm animals

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An accident that led to the electrocution of two farm dogs and 11 sheep, and very nearly a shepherd, has seen a house-moving company fined \$60,000.

On 18 December 2013, Britton Housemovers Ltd was moving a house under the direction of company director Arthur Britton along Herbertville Road in Herbertville, Hawke's Bay, when the house knocked down a power line.

An employee nudged the line off the house with a bit of wood. The line snapped and landed in a dry roadside ditch. The housemoving convoy passed on, without securing the area or alerting authorities.

Farmer Brian Speedy and shepherd Phillip Hanley waited till the road was clear before moving stock.

Some of the house movers waved at the pair, but did not tell them about the risk from the downed power line, the summary of facts states.

Several sheep stepped on the power line and were electrocuted. Two dogs were killed when they touched the electrocuted animals. Hanley reached out to grab the dead sheep, but was pulled back at the last moment by Speedy.

Meanwhile, a school bus stopped not far from the downed wire to pick up children.

Speedy and Hanley chased the house movers to tell them what happened. After a dispute, a house mover returned to put cones down near the line.

Britton and his team went on to deliver the house before returning to the scene, and Speedy alerted the emergency services.

Today in Hastings District Court the company was fined \$60,000 and Britton sentenced to four months home detention.

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WorkSafe's general manager of high hazards and specialist services said the company had been involved in a similar incident three years ago.

"There is no excuse for their behaviour and they were very lucky that the farmer's quick thinking stopped a possible death. Leaving a live line on the side of the road and not notifying anyone is unacceptable - the shepherd and others in the vicinity could have been killed," he said.

- The Dominion Post