

Industry Alert—Fatality

Cut-to-length processor operator crushed to death by feed rollers

What happened?

Before dawn on an extremely cold morning (-40 degrees), the owner/operator of a cut-to-length processor with five years experience climbed down from the cab with the machine running and the hydraulics engaged and began work on removing the measuring wheel, which measures the length of logs to be cut.

The processor head was resting on the ground in the upright position. The owner/operator was inside the processor head, his head and shoulders between the feed rollers that guide the logs into the processor head. As he attempted to manually remove the spring-loaded measuring wheel, a co-worker assisted from outside the processor head with a pry-bar. Shortly after the owner/operator began to pull on the measuring wheel, the feed rollers closed on him, pinning and crushing his head and upper shoulders.

Why did it happen?

In cold weather, operators of mechanical harvesting equipment sometimes leave their machines running through the night to keep the hydraulic fluids warm. In this case, the owner/operator started up the processor in the morning and began to do maintenance work while the machine was warming up and without switching off the hydraulics from the cab. This failure to shut down and lock out the hydraulics and the electronic components before performing maintenance was the major contributing factor in the fatality. Any movement of the measuring wheel could have sent a signal back to the computer, automatically triggering a command to the feed rollers.

How can it be prevented?

Maintenance work must never be done on equipment unless the equipment is shut down, locked out and in a zero-energy state. If this simple but crucial rule of occupational health and safety had been followed, the fatal incident would not have occurred.

Even in extremely cold weather, when machinery needs to be warmed up in order to function properly, the only safe way to do maintenance work is with the equipment shut down and locked out. In this case, the cut-to-length processor should have been started up only after the work on the measuring wheel was completed.

If there is any doubt about how to perform the repairs or maintenance work, the owner's manual should be consulted and, if necessary, the work should be done by more qualified personnel.

OFSWA Ontario Forestry Safe
Workplace Association

ASTIFO Association pour la sécurité au travail
dans l'industrie forestière de l'Ontario

Although the description of circumstances arises from an actual situation, this Industry Alert does not reflect the final analysis of the situation, nor is it meant to assign blame on the part of any person or member firm. For further information, contact OFSWA at (705) 474-7233.

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