

INDUSTRY ALERT

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Critical Injury

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Maintenance worker's hand drawn into bull edger, three fingers amputated

What happened?

A maintenance worker at a sawmill was informed by the edger/bull edger operator that a sliver of wood lodged in the bull edger was preventing the trip roller from releasing the infeed roller from its lowered position. The maintenance worker used a putty knife in his left hand to depress the microswitch on the side of the machine to bypass the trip roller and raise the infeed roller. He then reached with his right hand through the opening in the side of the bull edger and attempted to grab the lodged sliver of wood. The putty knife slipped off the microswitch, causing the infeed roller to drop onto his arm and pull it further into the machine. The first, second and third fingers of his right hand came into contact with the saw and all three fingers were severed below the joint at the hand. A fellow worker helped to free him from the machine.

Why did it happen?

Because of the nature of the equipment and process, removal of slabs and slivers from the edger/bull edger is required a few times per week and sometimes as often as several times a day. In this case the maintenance worker reached inside the machine in an attempt to free the sliver instead of using a wooden stick, which was the normal procedure. The normal procedure also involved placing the feed roller switch in the neutral position, which wasn't done in this case.

How can it be prevented?

One of the recommendations from the incident investigation team was that the safe operating procedure for removing slabs and slivers from the edger/bull edger be modified to clearly state how it's to be done, and that the procedure be reviewed with appropriate staff. The posting and demonstration of detailed, machine-specific procedures has the additional benefit of reminding workers of the hazards they face. Without such reminders, workers and supervisors can gradually become blind to the risks.

The incident investigation team also recommended that the openings to the edger/bull edger be painted a contrasting colour and that a warning to keep body parts out be posted near the openings. In this case, the maintenance worker presumably forgot about the potential consequences of reaching inside the machine. A sign warning against it might have been enough to make him think twice that day.

Development of detailed safe procedures, followed by continuous monitoring and enforcement of the use of the procedures, is the only way of ensuring that they have their intended effect. In this case, the feed roller switch needs to be in the neutral position and all saw blades must have stopped freewheeling before any attempt is made to free lodged wood.

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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 1-888-730-7821. For details on Ministry of Labour prosecutions regarding recent health and safety incidents in Ontario workplaces, visit www.labour.gov.on.ca and click on "Court Bulletins".