

INDUSTRY ALERT

NEAR MISS

Pike pole strikes electrical wires, causing mill-wide power outage

What happened?

A sawmill worker was standing on a catwalk above a bin of wood shavings, trying to loosen the shavings with a pike pole so that they could be fed from the bin into the burner that fires the kiln. Because the worker had been spending a lot of time trying to keep the shavings moving, he asked the supervisor to be relieved by someone else. A co-worker was assigned to take over the job. In an attempt to adjust the position of his pike pole, the new worker stepped onto the platform at the top of the stairs outside the kiln and pulled the pike pole out of the bin by sliding it along the hand railing of the stairs. As he was pulling the pole back, the far end of the pole came into contact with one of the electrical wires from the transformer next to the kiln. There was a flash, followed by a general power outage. Because the pike pole was resting on the railing at the time of the electrical contact, the electricity travelled along the pole to the railing and down to the ground. The pike pole burned and broke at the point of contact but the worker was not injured.

Why did it happen?

The on-the-spot safety orientation for the worker who took over the task of loosening the wood shavings related mainly to working near the railings of the catwalk. The safety orientation did not include the hazard of contacting electrical wires with the pike pole.

How can it be prevented?

A tool such as a pike pole, which can be as much as 10 feet in length, brings electrical hazards into play that might not otherwise be included in a hazard assessment for a specific task and work area. In this case, a thorough hazard assessment would have included the risk of the pole end making contact with electrical wires. A pike pole made of aluminum or any other metal should not be used if there is a risk of contact with electrical wires and any area in which pike poles are being used should be reviewed for any electrical hazards the pole could strike.

An effective hazard recognition process for any task must take into account all of the following five factors:

- **People** (worker experience and level of training, supervision, monitoring and enforcement of safe procedures);
- **Equipment** (guarding and lockout, safe use of appropriate tools, tools that may create new hazards);
- **Materials** (safe handling of raw materials, products and hazardous substances);
- **Environment** (physical conditions such as dimensions of the work area, potential electrical hazards, condition of working surfaces, housekeeping, ventilation, lighting);
- **Process** (design, organization, pace and flow of production and their impact on the other four factors).

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