

INDUSTRY ALERT

INJURY

Plywood mill employee pinned between hoist and stacker

What happened?

A jam occurred in one of the bins of a green end stacker, which collects bundles of veneer sheets before they go for drying. When an employee noticed the jam he stopped the stacker, which caused a bundle of poplar veneer sheets to come to a stop halfway out of one of the adjacent bins. The employee called for help to push the bundle completely out of the bin and onto the transfer chain. Two co-workers pushed the bundle with pipe poles (poles with a metal hook at the end) while he held down the hydraulics control button to line up the rolls. The bundle had just cleared the limit switch when the hoist started to rise back into position. The hoist caught one of the two workers and pinned him between the frame of the stacker and the hoist. The employee at the controls lowered the hoist to free his co-worker who suffered crush injuries to the abdomen and lower thorax and was taken by ambulance to hospital.

Why did it happen?

The stacker was not shut down and locked out. The unsafe procedure of clearing bundles with pipe poles while a worker manually controlled the hydraulics button had been in use at the mill since the equipment was installed and was considered a standard procedure. Each time workers cleared bundles by using this method, they were unwittingly “rehearsing” for the time when a specific combination of circumstances would demonstrate the danger of the procedure by injuring someone.

How can it be prevented?

Observing proper shutdown and lockout procedures every time without fail is important because it protects workers from all hazards related to the machinery, not just the obvious ones.

In this case, everyone felt that it was a reasonably safe practice to push the bundles with pipe poles while someone used the hydraulics button to keep the rolls in line. But automated systems are hazardous precisely because their movement are not under full manual control and a machine’s cycle can be re-activated without warning. In this case, as soon as the bundle cleared the limit switch the hoist automatically began to rise, pinning the worker.

After this incident, the company developed a new procedure for dealing with jammed bundles and planned to upgrade the equipment to prevent a recurrence. It also initiated a review of all work stations to assess hazards related to using hand tools and working around machinery, as well as machine-specific lockout procedures.

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