

INDUSTRY ALERT

CRITICAL INJURY

Sawmill worker struck in head by log, suffers concussion and fractures

What happened?

A sawmill worker was standing on the out-feed conveyor belt of a debarker, attempting to clear a log jam-up. When he pushed on one log, an adjacent log was moved onto an out-feed roll that was still moving. The log was lifted by the roll and struck the worker in the head. He was knocked unconscious and suffered a fractured cheekbone, crushed sinus, dislocated jaw, cracked left forehead and a concussion.

Why did it happen?

A Ministry of Labour investigation concluded that the worker had locked out the out-feed conveyor belt before attempting to clear the jam-up, but the out-feed roll had not been stopped or locked out.

How can it be prevented?

Section 75 of the Regulations for Industrial Establishments states that “motion that may endanger a worker” must be stopped before repair or maintenance is done on “a part of a machine, transmission machinery, device or thing”. This requirement to stop motion applies not just to the machine that’s being serviced but to any nearby moving machinery that could endanger a worker.

In this case, all the necessary precautions to stop the motion of the out-feed conveyor were taken before the worker attempted to clear the jam-up, but the out-feed roll was still moving and it was close enough to the jammed logs to affect them, resulting in serious multiple injuries to the worker. The employer pleaded guilty to failing to ensure that all motion that may endanger a worker was stopped and was fined \$65,000.

This incident shows that potentially deadly hazards can arise from machines or adjacent conveyor systems other than the one that’s being serviced. Lockout procedures regarding machine maintenance must assess any nearby moving machinery that could endanger the worker. If another machine is found to be a potential hazard, it must be included in the lockout procedure and must be dealt with as carefully as the machine that’s being serviced.

When unique work circumstances arise that could create hazards that aren’t foreseen in the written procedure, the onus is on the supervisor and worker to consult on any additional hazard controls that may be necessary before the work begins. Written procedures must be reviewed and revised if necessary any time equipment is altered.

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