

INDUSTRY ALERT

INJURY

Sawmill worker suffers twisted knee from contact with lumber storage bin

What happened?

A sawmill employee was working near the transfer chain from a planer, pulling 2.4-metre (eight-foot) 2x4 studs from the chain and stacking them in a wheeled storage bin. The worker attempted to pull the half-full storage bin toward him but it would not move. He pulled a second time, with more force. The bin suddenly came free, striking the worker's right leg and twisting it forcefully to the right. Although he felt immediate shooting pain through the knee and down the calf, the worker decided he was not seriously injured and continued to work. When he was limping noticeably an hour later, the incident was reported to the shift coordinator. After receiving first aid treatment, the worker was transferred to hospital and eventually diagnosed as requiring corrective surgery to his right knee joint. He was off work for several weeks.

Why did it happen?

The estimated weight of the half-full storage bin was about 400 kilograms (900 lbs.) The bins are designed to be manually pushed away from the transfer chains when they are fully loaded, but their hard rubber wheels can easily become jammed by debris. In this case, a number of factors contributed to the worker's injury:

- The storage bin was not correctly positioned in relation to the transfer chain at the time of the incident.
- There was a build-up of debris around the bin's wheels.
- Recent modifications to the bin handles resulted in the worker standing close to the bin while trying to pull it.
- The potential hazard of pulling storage bins instead of pushing them had been previously identified in a critical task analysis, but no recommendations had been incorporated into the written safe work procedure.

How can it be prevented?

This incident demonstrates the importance of performing a detailed risk assessment during the development of written safe work procedures for any job, so that all significant risks are clearly addressed in the written procedure. The incident also underlines the importance of close ongoing supervision of work practices in order to ensure that unsafe practices do not creep into the daily work routine.

After this incident, the company identified the installation of a mechanical stacker as a way of reducing the amount of manual stacking that would be required. The company also identified a number of hazard controls when manual stacking is performed, such as signs or labels warning workers not to pull the bins, marks on the floor to identify exactly where the bins should be parked, and adding the regular clearing of debris from the bin wheels to the safe work procedure for the job.

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