

INDUSTRY ALERT

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Critical Injury

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Worker's hand drawn into planer feeder

What happened?

A planer operator with eight years experience was working at the planer feeder when a broken piece of wood became jammed at the end of the feed table. The worker reversed the transfer chain that was the second closest to the live bridge, because the closest chain did not have a reverse function at the time. The worker then grabbed a board adjacent to the broken piece to push it through. It went through, but the board the worker was holding was grabbed by the pineapple rolls because of pressure from nearby boards. The worker did not have time to let go before his hand was pulled in by the pineapple rolls, causing crushing injuries to his hand.

Why did it happen?

The company's subsequent investigation identified a number of causes. A safe procedure for unjamming the planer was posted, but there was no posted procedure for unjamming the live bridge. When interviewed, three operators stated that the correct procedure for unjamming a piece was to stop the live bridge feedrolls and lift them out of the way. Two other operators, including the injured worker, stated that they did not stop or lift the rolls when unjamming the live bridge, but simply pushed or pulled the broken piece out with a pike pole or an adjacent board. The injured worker stated that the ideal way to unjam the piece would have been to stop the rolls and use a pike pole, but he said he felt pressure to keep production going.

Because the transfer chain nearest to the live bridge did not reverse, operators had to manually unjam broken pieces of wood. This problem was mentioned by a number of operators in interviews during the incident investigation. Some operators said they had brought this problem to the attention of management. This issue had never been reviewed by the joint health and safety committee. A health and safety tour prior to the incident had noted that a guard or barrier preventing access to the area would have forced workers to use one of the two pike poles that were available at the location.

How can it be prevented?

All aspects of a company's health and safety program – policies, procedures and the safe practices acquired in training – are effective only if they are regularly put into practice by workers and monitored and enforced by supervisors. Safe operating procedures need to be established for all hazardous work tasks, and they need to be followed at all times. All staff need to be clearly instructed that health and safety issues must never take a back seat to production issues.

When workplace inspections identify potential hazards such as the absence of a guard or barrier to restrict access to the pineapple rolls at the planer feeder, the identified hazard needs to be acted on and corrected **before** someone is injured.

Company records showed that the injured worker had been trained on the planer feeder position as recently as a month before his injury. The worker subsequently stated that he knew the safest way of unjamming broken pieces of wood from the planer feeder. Simply putting that knowledge into practice would have prevented the injury.

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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 705-474-7233. 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 "News Releases".