

INDUSTRY ALERT

FATALITY

Young worker dies after coming into contact with sawmill edger

What happened?

A 24-year-old trim saw operator with two and a half years experience crawled under the movable roller return table. He continued on his hands and knees or his belly until he was under the edger, a saw that's used to square the edges of lumber after it comes off the head saw. He may have been trying to put a "barn cleaner" system that collects sawdust under the edger back on its track. The three other workers in the room did not see him go under the edger. The edger had not been shut off or locked out. Although its blades were guarded along the top and sides, a portion of the blades was exposed underneath. The worker came into contact with the edger's blades after he had crawled under the edger or as he was backing out. He suffered head injuries and was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.

Why did it happen?

Although the worker usually operated the trim saw, he had some experience at the edger. He had been trained in lockout procedures and his cross-training on all positions in the mill had included blade changes on the edger. Physical contact with the blades of the edger occurred because the equipment had not been shut down and locked out before the worker went under it and there was no guard around the blades on the underside of the edger.

How can it be prevented?

Repeated exposure to a hazard can sometimes create a tendency to disregard or become blind to it. Persons who work around potentially lethal equipment such as mechanical saws can never afford to become complacent about the hazards of the equipment. Section 28(2)(b) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act states that no worker shall "operate any equipment, machine, device or thing or work in a manner that may endanger himself, herself or any other worker". Unfamiliar areas in the workplace should never be entered by a worker unless a supervisor or someone else in authority has been consulted.

The law on lockout requires that before a worker approaches equipment, any motion that may endanger a worker must be stopped, and any part that has been stopped and may subsequently move must be blocked to prevent its movement (Section 75, Regulations for Industrial Establishments). This legal responsibility applies to everyone in the workplace.

The unusual circumstances of this incident underline the importance of supervision and enforcement (including self-enforcement) as necessary follow-ups to safety training in the workplace. Because even the best supervisory staff can't be everywhere at all times, the joint responsibility to work safely also rests with individual workers. If workers have any doubts about the safety of a particular act or work area, they have the right and the responsibility to talk to their supervisor before doing anything else.

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OFSWA Ontario Forestry Safe
Workplace Association

ASTIFO Association pour la sécurité au travail
dans l'industrie forestière de l'Ontario

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.