

# Why Companies Need to Learn from Safety Incidents



Employers have a duty to take reasonable steps to protect workers from safety hazards. One way an employer may become aware of a hazard is when a worker gets hurt, often revealing an issue, such as a missing machine guard or inadequate PPE.

An employer's response to such an incident should be to address the newly revealed hazard and ensure it doesn't injure a worker again. So why do so many employers fail to learn from safety incidents and take appropriate preventative measures' (Read about a study that looked at why large companies have the tendency to make the same safety mistakes again and again.)

A company in Wisconsin ignored a previous incident on a piece of machinery, resulting in yet another similar incident on this equipment and a large fine from OSHA.

In 2015, a worker at a metal stamping plant in Oceola suffered an amputation while working on a spot welding machine just a year after another worker amputated part of her right index finger on the same machine.

And these incidents were hardly the only similar ones the company had experienced at its facilities. For example, in 2013, a worker at another facility had three fingers amputated on a power press. And in an incident in 2014, a worker at the Oceola plant suffered a crushed hand and finger amputation when her hand got caught in a metal coil straightening machine that fed a mechanical power press.

OSHA inspectors found that the company had failed to implement safety procedures they agreed upon to protect workers from machine operating parts. For example, after the first incident, the company agreed to manufacture fixtures to hold smaller parts, so welders wouldn't need to hold the parts with their fingers near the point of operation.

But in the wake of the latest amputation, investigators found that workers were still required to weld thousands of parts a month on spot welding machines with their hand and fingers inches away from the machine's operating parts during the

welding cycle. The company also failed to guard points of operation on welding machines as promised.

OSHA issued the company multiple violations, with proposed penalties of \$207,600.

*Bottom line:* This company operated various pieces of equipment that posed serious safety hazards to workers' hands, as demonstrated by various incidents. But it did nothing to address these hazards and protect workers using this machinery.

Note that the injured 19-year-old worker, who'd worked for the company for just two months, had operated the spot welding machine for only nine days before the amputation'yet another example of the vulnerability of new and young workers.