Do’s & Don’ts: Immediately Take Defective Equipment out of Service



If you learn that a piece of machinery or equipment is defective in some way through, say, an inspection, incident or near miss, make sure you immediately take the defective device out of service and either repair or replace it. Letting workers continue to use equipment or machinery that isn’t working properly can endanger workers and expose the company to liability for safety offences if the defect results in a safety incident or injury.

Look what happened to an Ontario steel manufacturer. A truck driver was assigned to pick up a 23,800-pound steel slab from the manufacturer’s plant. A worker used a 44-tonne crane with an attached electromagnet to pick up the slab and move it to the back of the truck. The truck driver stood on the flatbed to help maneuver the steel slab into position. But when the slab was in position, it unexpectedly dropped from the electromagnet and fell onto the flatbed, causing the driver to fall off the back of the truck onto the concrete floor. He was rushed to the hospital suffering from fractures, which, along with complications that included infection, resulted in an amputation.

The subsequent investigation found that the electromagnet had lost power because it’d become unplugged from its power outlet. In fact, the night before this incident, the same

electromagnetic crane had accidentally become disconnected from its power source, causing a suspended steel lab to detach and fall in the same manner as the slab.

The manufacturer's policies required pre-incident checks of cranes and electromagnets before each use and a lockout procedure if any safety concern respecting a crane or electromagnet existed. But although a prompt request was made for maintenance to examine the machinery the next morning, the electromagnet crane wasn't immediately taken out of service. As a result, the manufacturer pleaded guilty to failing to take the reasonable precaution of immediately taking an electromagnetic lifting device out of service after it accidentally disconnected from its power source. The court fined it $100,000 [*Schmolz + Bickenbach Canada Inc.*, Govt. News Release, April 19, 2015].