

Sawmill Incidents Prompt Lockout Hazard Alert from WorkSafeBC



There were three incidents at BC sawmills that resulted in serious lacerations or amputations. In these incidents, blades were still rotating or spinning heads were freewheeling to a stop when workers reached inside the machine or contacted the moving parts in some other way. And in each incident, workers thought the equipment had been locked out.

In response to these incidents, WorkSafeBC issued a hazard alert on locking out sawmill machinery. The alert notes that turning off a machine and applying a lock isn't all there is to lockout. If blades are still 'spinning down,' the machine still has residual energy and is therefore dangerous.

The hazard alert recommends that employers protect workers from the hazards posed by sawmill machinery by ensuring that they're properly trained. (These recommendations would apply to other kinds of energized machinery in other kinds of workplaces, too.) Workers should understand:

- The risks posed by machinery and all the steps and procedures required to shut down a machine safely. Follow up with workers to verify that they understand the risks and are following procedures properly.
- That moving parts *must* come to a complete stop before workers clear a jam or work on a machine. If a machine has a stopping mechanism, such as brakes, workers should use it after shutting off the machine and applying a lock. If there's no stopping mechanism, workers must wait until the moving parts have come to a complete stop.
- How to tell when moving parts have stopped. Looking at a machine, listening or relying on touch points may not indicate that it has come to a complete stop. So have a system in place to tell if moving parts have completely stopped. For example, use sensors on moving parts that'll indicate with a flashing light if the part is still moving.

The WorkSafeBC hazard alert also includes three additional factors to consider in ensuring that your lockout process is safe:

1. A risk assessment is an important first step in making sure your procedures match your situation. So evaluate lockout procedures regularly and ensure that all energy sources are identified. Make sure procedures are easy to understand for all workers and relevant to all your machinery.
2. Some risk controls are better than others. When it comes to hazards, such as freewheeling blades, there's a hierarchy of risk control. First, try to eliminate the hazard completely through safeguarding or other engineering methods. If elimination isn't possible, use lockout policies and procedures.
3. Shift or personnel changes may interrupt a lockout process. So make sure procedures are in place to ensure adequate communication and transfer of control so that all workers know the status of machinery.