Spot The Safety Violation: Power Tool Common Sense

Teamwork is great but is this really the safest way for the worker on the ground to help his co-worker’

For a safe and efficient workplace, it’s important for workers to work together. But you shouldn’t put yourself in a dangerous position just to help a co-worker.

For example, acting as a table for a co-worker operating a circular saw like the worker on the ground in this picture is neither smart nor safe. What's particularly disturbing about this picture is that it clearly shows surfaces in the background on which the worker could've safely cut the material. And it doesn't help that although the worker with the saw is wearing hearing protection, his eye protection is on top of his head and doing nothing to protect his eyes from any dust or chips kicked up by the saw.

4 Key Areas to Cover in a Power Tool Program

The OHS laws require employers to protect workers from hazards posed by the use of power tools, such as circular saws. The best way to comply with these requirements is with a power tool program that covers these four key areas:

1. Power tool selection. It's important that you ensure that the right power tools are available to workers based on the jobs they'll be used for and the hazards posed. Using the wrong power tool for the job can endanger workers. For example, using a power tool that emits sparks in a confined space containing a potentially combustible atmosphere could result in an explosion. And consider the tool's design and any specific safety features, such as rubberized grips or ergonomic handles.

2. Safe work procedures. Having the right power tools for the job won't protect workers if they don't use those tools properly. For example, in the picture, a circular saw is likely the correct power tool for this task but the manner in which the workers are using it is unsafe. So develop and implement:

- General safe work procedures for all power tools that cover topics such as guarding, electrical hazards and use of PPE; and
- Procedures for each specific kind of power tool used in

the workplace. These procedures should cover both the OHS requirements for those kinds of tools and the manufacturer's specifications for their tools.

3. Tool inspection and maintenance. Power tools that are damaged or fall into disrepair can endanger the workers who use them. For example, using a tool with a frayed power cord could result in an electric shock. So all power tools should be inspected both before and after their use for any defects or damage. If a power tool isn't working properly or is damaged in any way, it should be taken out of service until it's fixed and safe to use. (See, a safety talk on inspecting power tools.)

Example: A 17-year-old worker in New Brunswick was electrocuted while using a floor buffing and polishing machine on the wet floor of a garage at a Wal-Mart. The floor polisher had been purchased by one of the other technicians at a yard sale and brought to the garage for use. But it wasn't inspected monthly, although the technicians' supervisor knew it was being used. Wal-Mart pleaded to three OHS violations, including failing to ensure the floor buffer was inspected, and a supervisor pleaded guilty to two violations. The court fined the company $120,000'the highest fine ever imposed in the province for a safety violation'and the supervisor $880 [*Wal-Mart Canada and Denis Morin*, March 21, 2012].

In addition, power tools must be properly maintained. For example, require workers to clean and, if necessary, lubricate their power tools after each use. And make sure that power tools are properly stored when not in use so they don't get damaged.

4. Training. Lastly, workers who use power tools must get proper training. General power tool training should cover:

- General safe work procedures;
- Safe work procedures for the specific kinds of power

tools the worker will use on the job;
- Procedures for reporting damaged tools; and
- Inspection and maintenance of tools.

You can use this checklist to assess the hand and power tool safety measures in your workplace.