Spot The Safety Violation: Why You Shouldn’t Stand on Conveyors



What could happen if the workers standing on this conveyor belt should fall’

Conveyor belts are very useful in the workplace for transporting materials, goods, parts and other items through the workplace. But unless the conveyors are specifically designed to transport people, workers generally shouldn’t stand on the belts or their supporting frames unless the conveyors have been turned off and locked out.

These pictures are from a piece by ABC News on a worker in Oklahoma who died inside a massive dryer at a laundry facility after he fell from a conveyor belt while trying to unclog a jammed load of laundry.

The facility used conveyor belts to move laundry from the washers to the dryers. When a large load of jeans began to clog up near the opening of the dryer, the worker hopped onto the conveyor belt to get it moving again (as shown in the bottom picture).

The worker fell into the 300øF dryer and the door closed automatically. He tumbled in the dryer for 20 minutes before someone noticed the machine was making an unusual sound.

The employer had warned workers that climbing onto a jammed conveyor was dangerous and barred the practice, but workers told ABC News that it was a common way for them to get a clogged conveyor belt moving again. In fact, the top picture shows yet another worker engaging in exactly the same practice as the worker who died.

5 KEYS TO COMPLYING WITH CONVEYOR REQUIREMENTS

Each jurisdiction's OHS regulations include specific requirements for conveyors and conveyor belts. (See this chart for the requirements in each jurisdiction.) As always, you should consult and comply with the requirements in your jurisdiction's OHS laws. But an OHS program that covers these five key areas is likely to comply with the conveyor requirements across Canada:

1. **Proper Design**

Conveyors must be properly designed and constructed to ensure their safe use. So the OHS regulations often require such equipment to comply with a designated standard, usually ASME B20.1, *Safety Standard for Conveyors and Related Equipment* (version 1993 or 2000). The OHS regulations may also include additional design requirements.

2. Guarding

The OHS regulations usually require conveyors to have guarding that:

Protects workers from pinch points/nip hazards. Workers can get caught in parts of a conveyor such as spools, pulleys, rollers, etc. and seriously injured. Because of these pinch points or nip hazards, the basic guarding requirements for machinery and equipment likely apply to conveyors. In addition, some jurisdictions have conveyor-specific guarding requirements, such as requiring a belt conveyor to have accessible nip points of spools and pulleys guarded to prevent

contact by a worker.

Prevents materials from falling off the conveyor. The other hazard guarding is intended to address is the risk of materials falling off the conveyor and striking a worker. In general, a conveyor must have either high side walls, sheet metal, guardrails, screen guards, sideboards or other guards to prevent materials from falling off of it if:

- It’s an elevated conveyor that passes over a walkway or a place where a worker may pass or work; or
- Falling material presents a hazard to workers.

3. Emergency Stopping System

In general, a conveyor should have an emergency stopping system that’s designed and installed so that it activates if a worker falls onto the conveyor or if a fallen worker on the conveyor moves an arm or leg off to one side of the conveyor. (It’s unclear whether the conveyor belt system shown in these pictures had a functional emergency stopping system.)

After an emergency stop, the conveyor shouldn’t be restarted until an inspection has determined it can be operated safely. And even then, manual resetting should be required before the conveyor can be restarted.

4. Crossing Over or Under Conveyors

If an elevated conveyor passes over a walkway or an area where workers may work or walk, it should have guards or other measures to prevent materials from falling from it. And if workers need to access an elevated conveyor, it should have walkways that have appropriate guardrails.

If workers need to cross *over* conveyors, there should be adequate crossing facilities, such as bridges, provided for them to use to do so. These bridges should typically be at least one metre wide and have adequate guardrails.

5. Safe Work Rules

Set safe work rules for the operation of conveyors, train workers on them and discipline workers when they violate the rules, which should, at a minimum:

- Bar workers from standing on the conveyor belt or its supporting frame while loading or unloading the conveyor or when clearing blockages like the workers in these pictures *unless* the conveyor is stopped and has been locked out;
- Prohibit workers from riding on a conveyor (unless it's specifically designed and used to transport people);
- Require workers to remove heavy or bulky articles by hand from a moving conveyor at designated stations only;
- Require workers to cross under a moving conveyor belt only at a walkway or other designated place;
- Require workers to use a walkway or bridge to cross over a conveyor if the belt is moving or is motionless but hasn't been locked out; and
- Allow workers to cross over a conveyor at a location other than a bridge if the belt has been locked out.