

TRAPS TO AVOID: Omitting Key Equipment from Safety Inspections



One of the most important tools in ensuring compliance with the OHS laws is the healthy and safety inspection. Often conducted by the JHSC and in conjunction with management, regular inspections of the workplace are intended to identify safety hazards before they result in incidents. But such inspections are effective only when they cover all key areas of the workplace and key pieces of equipment, especially those that pose safety risks. Failing to inspect dangerous equipment may mean that hazards get overlooked and unaddressed. And ultimately, these hazards may result in worker injuries and OHS violations. That's what happened to an employer in Alberta.

Conveyors Not Covered by JHSC Inspections

A warehouse distribution centre contained several waist-height motorized conveyors. A worker bent down to plug a portable

scale into an extension cord that was located under a moving conveyor belt. She felt something tug her from behind. She tried to use her hands to avoid getting pulled into an unguarded drive shaft. The worker lost some hair, injured her hand and part of her thumb was amputated. She also had to have surgery on her head. As a result, the employer was charged with two OHS violations, including failing to guard moving parts of machinery. It raised a due diligence defence.

The court convicted the employer. Due diligence required the employer to take all reasonably practical steps to ensure the health and safety of workers and to address foreseeable hazards. It was reasonably foreseeable that the unguarded drive shaft on the conveyor posed a safety hazard, said the court. But the employer didn't take reasonable steps to protect workers from this hazard.

For example, the employer had a JHSC, which used a six-page checklist to conduct safety inspections of the warehouse. But the checklist didn't contain any specific references to conveyors by name or by individual conveyor, noted the court. The only reference to any expected inspections of the conveyors was found in three general items:

- Inspect guards, where applicable, installed on all mechanical equipment;
- Inspect all belts and rollers for damage or excessive wear; and
- Inspect track line for any damages or alignment issues resulting from impact.

The inspectors weren't trained or expected to look closely at conveyors' despite the fact that conveyors were a crucial piece of equipment in the warehouse and posed serious safety hazards to workers. In short, the employer relied upon its JHSC to spot the lack of guarding on conveyors when its members were doing inspections but no one bothered to look closely at the conveyor during those inspections, concluded the court [[R. v.](#)

[Value Drug Mart Associates Ltd.](#)].

SOLUTION: Ensure Inspections Include All Key Equipment

To be effective, safety inspections should cover all key equipment in the workplace. Ensure that your inspection team pays particular attention to all aspects of the workplace that have the potential to cause illness or injury to workers, including:

- The physical structures or buildings that make up the workplace, such as doors, HVAC systems, flooring, loading docks, fire exits, storage racks, elevated structures and parking lots;
- Tools, machinery and equipment. For example, the team should note whether machinery and equipment are working properly and are being regularly and appropriately maintained;
- Confined spaces;
- Materials handling and storage;
- Processes and procedures; and
- Workers.

During the inspection, team members should look for:

- New safety hazards;
- Potential hazards, such as machinery that's showing signs of wear and tear or unguarded pinch points; and
- Hazards that were identified in prior inspections but haven't been addressed.

In addition, although inspection checklists, forms and the like can be very useful, ensure that these documents are also inclusive and cover *all* key equipment and hazards, such as chemicals, present in the workplace. (Go to the [OHS Toolbox](#) for checklists for general inspections and for inspections for specific hazards and equipment, such as storage racks.)

Insider Says: For more information on safety inspections and

the JHSC's role in them, see '[The Joint Health & Safety Committee: Part 1: The Committee's Role in Workplace Inspections](#),' Sept. 2007, p. 1 and '[The Joint Health & Safety Committee: Part 2: Five Steps for Effective Workplace Inspections](#),' Oct. 2007, p. 1.

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[*R. v. Value Drug Mart Associates Ltd.*](#), 2014 ABPC 164 (CanLII), July 29, 2014