

Reviewing Your LO/TO Program



Resource: Minnesota Safety Council

Are your machines stopped, isolated from all potential hazardous energy sources, and locked out before maintenance or service is performed? If not, you should check your procedures and training. Examples of incidents from around the country highlight how easy it is for lockout / tagout injuries to occur – and their long-lasting consequences:

1. **Did you do enough?** It's natural to think that once you've taken the steps to safely prevent stored energy from being released, you've done enough. One employee thought a wooden chock would prevent a 10-ton portion of a hydraulic press from coming down on him as he performed routine maintenance. Unfortunately, the chock slipped and the press crushed him to death. "Chocking" a machine is not the same as locking it out. OSHA fined the company over \$100,000 and the widow sued for wrongful death. The lawsuit may take years to go through the system.

Lesson: Substitute methods don't protect employees

2. **Who works here anyway?** Many industries have temporary employees and contractors. A company in Wisconsin employed temporary workers from two different agencies. "Employee A" bypassed a safety switch to "fix" a machine and his right arm became stuck, but not injured. "Employee B" panicked and tried to free Employee A's arm but instead pushed the wrong button and started the machine. "Employee A's" arm was crushed.

Lesson: Make sure your training includes non-employees exposed to stored energy hazards and that they know how to respond to emergency situations; otherwise, they may "wing it," instead of getting help.

3. **She just started – was she trained?** A new employee was asked to "unjam" a Styrofoam machine. She wasn't sure how to proceed but thought if she climbed into the machine and removed the jammed material, it would be fine. She failed to lock

out the machine and (you know what comes next) the machine started up. The released energy, stored as gravity, crushed her.

Lesson: New workers are sometimes overwhelmed with information and instructions. Remind workers that jammed machines may have stored energy and can cycle as soon as a worker removes a jammed part. Dealing with machine jams should wait until the workers are familiar with safety procedures and the hazards of the specific machine.

Here are four steps that can reduce lockout / tagout injuries:

1. Have workers sign a hazard analysis document. This can be done at a preshift meeting. It alerts the workers to the hazards they may encounter. Their signatures should verify that they understand the dangers and agree to follow safety procedures.
2. Ask workers questions. “Which lock box should you be on?” “What PPE is necessary?”
3. Perform periodic surprise inspections. If workers are violating safety rules, let them know they could face disciplinary action.
4. Reward good behavior. While making inspections, make sure you find workers doing something right and praise them for it. The workers will want to “keep up the good work.”

Protect your employees and teach them your lockout / tagout procedures. It may just save their lives!

Lockout / Tagout Resources:

Fact sheets (English and Spanish):

- www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/fact/ (“At Work”: “Lockout / Tagout,” “Candando/Etiqueta”)

Plans, Policies and Checklists section:

- Lockout / Tagout Procedures
- Federal OSHA eTools:
www.osha.gov/dts/osta/lototraining/index.htm