Experienced Worker Becomes Entangled in Unguarded Drum



A lead hand employed by a heavy equipment dealer was responsible for operating a grader and a simple conveyor system. The conveyor was being used to separate topsoil. The conveyor was set on the diagonal, and rose about 20 feet in the air from its base. It was supposed to be stopped and lowered to a horizontal position for any maintenance such as greasing the drums in the middle of the unit.

On the day of the tragedy, the worker climbed up the conveyor to the middle unit. He became entangled in the moving machinery. When co-workers found him, his shoulder was pinned between the axle of the drum and the bar below it. He was hanging with his feet off the ground. His upper arm was broken, and an artery was severed. He was bleeding severely, and quickly lost consciousness.

Emergency crews rushed to the scene. The fire department had to send for a back-up unit with compressed air tools to dismantle the equipment so the victim could be freed. In the meantime, a doctor considered amputating the victim’s arm at the scene, but decided against it because the bleeding could not have been stopped. Despite all efforts to revive the victim, he died at a hospital shortly after he was transported there.

No one knows why the victim climbed up the conveyor. His co-workers said they had never seen anyone do that before. He was carrying a wrench at the time and was possibly planning to use it to knock some mud off the drum. He had worked for this employer for nearly 20 years and had spent several years running this particular piece of equipment. There was no machine guard over this section of drums. It was an old style conveyor, built without the screening which would have prevented accidental contact with the moving parts.

There is no substitute for using the correct machine guards. Look over your job site for possible placement of guards. No matter how experienced you are, there is always the potential for making the one wrong move which will cost you a limb or your life.