Sawmill Safety Fatality File



Sawmill worker killed while unplugging wood chips from a chipper duct.

A 22-year-old male employee died after being caught by a cable while cleaning a wood-chipping machine at a sawmill. The family-owned business had been in operation for several years with about 10 employees, although the number varied throughout the year. The process included discarded wood pieces from the sawmill, which were carried on a conveyor belt and fed into a woodchipper. The discharge chute was attached to a section of round duct, which was used to transport the chipped material into a hopper. The material was collected in a container below the hopper and removed from the area. On the day of the incident, the round duct became plugged. The victim stood on a platform, and with the assistance of another employee, he removed the access cover on the hopper, and pushed a straight cable into the duct to clean out the duct while the chipper was running. According to the supervisor, the cable was marked with paint, to designate how far the cable could be inserted into the duct. The cable got caught in the chipper and wrapped around the employee□s neck causing him to be thrown off the platform instantaneously. An employee called the local sheriff for assistance using a cellular phone, since there was no phone at the sawmill. The County sheriff, county EMS (Emergency Medical Service), and local fire department Jaws of Life responded to the call. The victim received multiple cervical fractures and died within minutes.

RECOMMENDATIONS based on our evaluation are as follows:

1. Employers should establish an energy control program in accordance with the requirements of 29 CFR 1910.147. The program should include procedures and employee training to ensure that equipment is locked out and rendered inoperative before any employee performs servicing or maintenance on a piece of equipment.
2. All maintenance tasks should be carried out only when the machine is locked out. Employers should ensure that machinery operates properly and does not require excessive maintenance.
3. Employers should ensure that a job safety analysis has been performed on all work-related tasks.
4. Employers should develop, implement, and enforce a written safety program.