Struggle With Logjam Claims Mill Worker



A clean-up worker was killed when struck by a rotating cut-off saw as he and a co-worker tried to clear a logjam on a mill conveyor. The victim, a temporary employee who had worked at the veneer plant for only eight weeks, died of multiple injuries.

The 60-inch (1.5-meter) diameter cut-off saw was used to trim the ends off logs as they move along a conveyor belt from the debarker to the grading area. The victim's job was to remove the log ends after they dropped to the floor.

The victim first tried to free the log while standing on the floor. The sawline operator, seeing the jam, left the control room and mounted a catwalk over the sawline. He and the victim tried again to free the log while the saw was still rotating. When that didn't work, the operator jumped down to the floor and tried to move the log.

The victim, meanwhile, jumped up on the out-feed conveyor frame. Seeing the victim on the conveyor near the rotating saw, the grader operator signaled the debarker in the control room to shut down the saw. The operator reached for the lever, but inadvertently pushed the cut-off cycle control, which caused the saw to advance, severely injuring the victim, who was pronounced dead on arrival at hospital.

Lockout procedures are part of the answer:
Investigators recommended the employer establish lockout/tagout procedures. Such rules protect workers from the release of stored energy sources, including rotating saws. Specifically, investigators suggested installing an emergency stop switch for the entire sawline, including both the cycling and rotation of the cut-off saw. They also suggested setting specific procedures to clear logjams.

They recommended the control panel be redesigned to prevent the unintended activation of potentially dangerous assembly line functions.

The employer was asked to develop and enforce a safety program that would include hazard recognition and avoidance and safe work procedures. In this case, the victim was working adjacent to the saw daily and may have become desensitized to the hazard.

Think about your own work area. Do you remain aware of hazards even if you see them every day?