Supervisor Dies After Snagging Lever



Workers can be extremely careful about keeping their hands away from machine controls, but overlook the possibility that a shirt pocket or other piece of clothing can snag onto those controls, with disastrous consequences.

A 63-year-old shift supervisor at a food processing plant in Oregon died in February 2006 while operating a tote (box) dumping machine. He activated the machine to raise and tilt a large box of frozen French fries into a hopper, and then leaned over the edge of the hopper. His purpose in doing so appears either to have been to dislodge fries remaining in the tote, or to retrieve a box liner that had fallen into the hopper.

While leaning over, the supervisor’s right jacket pocket caught the end of the tote-dump control lever and pushed it downward. This inadvertent action resulted in the dump arm descending, striking the worker in the back and crushing him against the hopper.

The victim was pronounced dead upon arrival at a local hospital. He had 35 years’ experience in the food-processing industry, including 4.5 years at the plant, and one year as quality assurance and safety manager.

A National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) report into the fatality released the following recommendations:

- The hands or body should never be placed in the operating areas of a machine without first shutting down the machine and locking out all forms of hazardous energy.
- Machine activation mechanisms should be guarded to prevent unintended startup. Guarding should also restrict access to all moving, shear and pinchpoint areas on machinery.
- Employees should develop a comprehensive hazardous energy program that includes machine-specific lockout procedures.
- Employers should conduct regular hazard surveys of the workplace, and a job safety analysis of each job should be undertaken to correct unsafe work practices.

- Employers should investigate on-the-job injuries and review work procedures in order to correct hazards and prevent similar incidents.

This story shows that no one, not even a safety manager, is immune to hazards in the workplace. Share it with your workers.