Five Mistakes That Can Cause Injury During a Lockout/Tagout

Lockout/tagout is a set of procedures, that when properly designed, keeps workers safe during the servicing of machinery or other energized systems. Any company that routinely performs this kind of maintenance is required by OSHA standard 29 CFR 1910.147 to have a lockout/tagout operating procedure.

However, in spite of the standard, approximately 50,000 workers are injured and 120 workers are killed annually in equipment startup accidents. Here are the five most common reasons employees are hurt during lockout/tagout:

· **Failure to stop equipment –** This should be common sense, but that isn't always the case. Some workers feel that productivity will suffer if they take the time to stop/restart equipment. Others feel that their experience with the equipment gives them the ability to work on it without having to safeguard it. Both attitudes can be fatal.

· **Failure to disconnect from the power source –** One of the most common misconceptions among workers is that merely flipping the on/off switch on electrical equipment is all that is necessary to be safe. They never consider the fact that the switch may be defective or that power can still come through a short circuit.

· **Failure to drain residual energy -** Many electrical devices store power in a capacitor or battery. There is still the risk of being shocked by the equipment even after the plug has been removed from the electric outlet. A hot pipe, or a pressurized tank continues to carry energy, even when the initial source of that energy is disconnected. All stored energy must be completely blocked or released if workers are to be safe.

· **Failure to confirm that co-workers are not in the path of danger before restarting –** There is a high incidence of workers causing injury to their fellow employees by restarting machines before making sure that it is safe to restart.

· **Failure to clear work areas before restarting -** A repair tool left in the works to fly out and hit someone can be as big a hazard as not locking out the machine.

The best way to counteract these mistakes is to follow two mandates set forth in 29 CFR 1910.147. First, employers should review every lockout/tagout process annually, write a report documenting the inspection, and discuss the results of the review process with a person authorized to use the equipment. The inspection report should include such details as the process inspected, the employees involved, the date, and the name of the inspector.

The second requirement is for all persons authorized to perform lockout/tagout to be trained. Retraining is required if an employee changes jobs, if a new machine or process is brought into the workplace, if there's a change in the manner in which energy sources are controlled, if procedures have not been followed, or if there has been an incident.

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