Immobilize With the Proper Lockout Procedure

Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

To immobilize the machine with the proper lockout/tagout procedure, or be immobilized yourself.

That's the bottom line when it comes to your safety around machinery.

What's the Danger?

Lockout procedures eliminate the chance a machine could become energized whenever it is being cleaned, repaired, maintained, or unjammed. A lockout procedure requires you to shut off and lock out all types of energy that can feed a machine including:

- electric energy
- compressed air
- chemical reactions
- hydraulic power
- mechanical power
- and simple gravity

Any of these examples can injure or kill you, but if you know what to do in an emergency you increase your odds of making it through the situation safely.

How to Protect Yourself

A procedure usually requires that locks and tags be applied to lock out each energy source at its control point. The only person who can remove the lock is the person who installed the lock, which is why it is vital for necessary steps to be in place so locks are not left on if a person working on the machine has left for the day. Lockouts also require that stored energy be released prior to any work being performed. Once all energy is released and power sources locked out, a verification process is required to confirm that the procedure has been thorough. All employees in the area must be notified of the on-going procedure.

Failure to complete a lockout procedure can be deadly. Stored or residual energy such as a pressurized hydraulic cylinder is an unexpected trap waiting for an unsuspecting worker. In fact, 82 per cent of lockout fatalities investigated in a recent study

were found to be the direct result of a failure to “completely de-energize, isolate, block or dissipate an energy source during the lockout procedure.”

Unfortunately, many workers still rely on luck or so-called common sense instead of locks and tags to ensure their safety when performing maintenance tasks.

For example, a fatal incident occurred when a hospital employee who was cleaning an industrial laundry dryer did not lockout or deenergize the dryer. Instead, he propped open the dryer door activating an error light on the control panel and climbed inside. A coworker saw the error light and reset the panel. The laundry door swung shut and the dryer began its cycle. The worker was tumbled and heated. He died shortly afterward of head trauma and severe burns.

This example illustrates the three-pronged approach of the lockout/tagout procedure. You need to consider the energy stored in the machine, the power sources feeding the machine, as well as your coworkers who could activate a machine.

Final Word

There is no doubt that the lockout/tagout procedure saves lives. But it has to be properly performed and verified if it is to safeguard your life. Don’t place your safety in other people’s hands. Take control and use the lockout procedure.