Lock Out Accidents

It takes energy to run the equipment in our workplace. The types of energy commonly used includes electrical, hydraulic (oil or water pressure), pneumatic (air pressure), mechanical, steam and gravity.

Sometimes this very useful energy can be the enemy. It can result in injury and death when it causes machinery or materials to move unexpectedly. This is the reason our company has a lockout policy, which protects you from movement or the unexpected release of energy when you are installing, repairing or adjusting equipment. The procedures are in place to make sure the equipment is isolated from all energy sources before anyone begins servicing it.

Here are some examples: Let's say you have been assigned to sweep up the waste material which has accumulated under a conveyor. You need to know for sure that someone cannot accidentally start the conveyor while you're in the danger area. Or let's say you are qualified and authorized to make electrical repairs. You have to know that someone isn't going to turn the breaker back on while you are still in contact with circuits.

Another example is work in a confined space such as a hopper. Before you go in there, you have to know that someone cannot start the machinery or release materials which could bury you. (Keep in mind that the lockout procedure is just one of the safe work practices which would be required in these situations - there is a lot more to staying safe when working around machinery, electricity or confined spaces.

You must turn off the machine, the power source and the flow of any materials before attempting to service equipment. The next step is the lockout - making sure that someone else cannot accidentally turn it back on.

If you are authorized to use lockouts, you will be trained in identifying and locking out energy sources. You must follow your company's procedures carefully to make sure that you are protected. Lockout simply means placing a lock on the part of the equipment which controls the energy. This could be a circuit breaker, valve, switch or other device. Lockout also includes blinding and blanking of pipes and vessels so gases, liquids or granual materials cannot escape. The lock must be one designated for this purpose only, and must not be used for anything else. It must be durable enough for the purpose and the environment. It must be strong enough that it can't be removed easily - only by strong force or a tool.

The locks will be accompanied by tags explaining the dangers and identifying the person who has installed the lockout. This is the only person who will be allowed to remove the lock. The tag tells others not to start or operate the machine.

Here are some of the steps in a typical lockout procedure:

- Get ready for the shutdown by determining the energy sources, hazards and devices.

- Tell any affected co-workers that you will be implementing a lockout procedure.

- Turn off the equipment.

- Locate all energy sources and isolate them. Part of this step involves getting rid of any stored energy by releasing springs, lowering or blocking raised loads, and relieving air or water pressure. Lines may have to be blocked or emptied.

- Attach a lock to the energy controls such as switches so that they remain in an "off" position. When more than one person will be working on the equipment - such as an electrician and a millwright - each must attach a lock.

- Try out the controls to make sure that they are indeed locked.

- Test to make sure that electrical parts and circuits are not still energized.

- Do your work, and remove locks and tags when the work is completed.

- Never remove someone else's lock! If the person who placed the lock has left the plant and cannot be found, there are certain procedures to be followed under strict supervision to remove the lock.

Lockout is required by law. The actual lockout steps which you must carry out will depend on your own company's policies.

Even if you are not directly involved in lockout procedures at your workplace, you need to know what they are all about. Do not attempt to start machinery which is locked or tagged. Never tamper with a lockout or tagout device. If machinery starts up unexpectedly, the result can be fatal.