



Safeguards for Machinery

Provided by Wendell Macnab
Association Coordinator

Two basic safety methods are used to keep you from slicing or dicing your fingers, hands and other body parts on industrial machines. They are guards and devices.

Guards are physical barriers to the blades, saws or danger areas. They enclose dangerous machine parts and prevent worker contact. Guards must be secure and strong. Workers should not be able to bypass, remove or tamper with them.

To prevent tampering, guards typically require a tool to unfasten and remove them.

Guards should not create additional hazards, such as pinch points or shear points, between them and other machine parts. They also should be made and installed in a manner that does not obstruct the operator's view or prevent workers from doing a job, which is why metal bars, Plexiglas or similar materials are suitable.

Devices interrupt the machine's operating cycle to prevent workers from reaching in or entering the danger area, while the machine is cycling. Safeguarding devices typically help prevent operator contact with the point of operation. They may be used in place of guards or as a supplemental control when guarding alone does not adequately enclose the hazard.

These devices are designed to either interrupt the normal cycle of the machine if the worker's hands reach the point of operation; prevent the worker from reaching into the point of operation; or withdraw the worker's hands if they are located in or near the point of operation when the machine cycles.

Machine operators are responsible for safeguarding them and safety should be considered this need when purchasing machinery. Most equipment already comes with manufactured installed safeguards, but used equipment may not.

If you've got machinery with no safeguards, you can purchase guards or devices from either the original machine manufacturer or an after-market manufacturer. You can also build and install safeguards in-house. But only technically qualified professionals to design and install these safety tools.

Employers also need to implement good housekeeping practices to promote safe working conditions around machinery. These can include:

- Remove slip, trip and fall hazards from the area around the machinery
- Use drip pans when oiling equipment
- Remove waste as it is generated
- Design the work area large enough for operations and maintenance
- Place machines away from high-traffic areas to reduce worker distraction

Also, make sure machine operators do not wear loose-fitting clothing, jewelry, or other items that could become entangled in machinery. Long hair should be worn under a cap or contained to prevent entanglement.

In addition to employee instruction and training, provide adequate supervision to reinforce safe practices and set up disciplinary action to enforce these practices and working conditions.

OSHA provides general industry standards for machine guarding in 29 CFR Part 1910 Subpart O. You can obtain this document at www.osha.gov.

If you would like more information on workplace safety please contact your Association Coordinator Wendell Macnab

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