

SAFETY MATTERS

Common-sense commentary on how easy—and important—it is to stay sharp on the job when it comes to safety.

I would like to expand on my comment in the last column concerning cleanliness of the work area. You may not think of this as a safety issue, but I find that a clean, organized work area is one of the best deterrents to those nagging little injuries that seem to occur no matter what. I find that if I allow my employees time to clean up and organize tools and tooling, clean the machine, and keep their work area neat and free of oily floors and surfaces, not only do they perform better, but there is virtually no lost production. I consider this time a necessary requirement for operating a safe shop.

Many of us have older equipment cutting gears in our shops. When we look longingly at the newest CNC gear-cutting equipment at shows or in advertisements, we note that these machines seem to have much better guarding systems than those on our older, “vintage” equipment. While it is not practical to attempt to duplicate this guarding on our older machines, it is possible to upgrade. Many of the manufacturers—or those who are still in business, at least—can provide upgraded guarding for these older machines. And even if we can’t obtain these updates from the original manufacturers, there are many generic guards available through the various tool supply houses that can be applied with little or no modifications. These guards are not very expensive and could keep a serious injury from occurring.

It doesn't take any extra time or effort to be willing to question unsafe conditions in the workplace.

While we’re discussing guarding I would like to point out that in the ANSI B11.11 standard, which is available through the AMT, guarding requirements for various types of gear cutting equipment are well defined. There is another area of this subject to bring up, as well. I see many cases where the existing guards on machines in shops are not being used or have been bypassed. When I question this, I am often

told that they were taken off for maintenance or cleaning and that it was just easier to leave them off. Another reason I’m given is

that they (the guards) were in the way and slowed down production. While these practices may seem to save time, in reality they could halt productive time completely should an injury occur. It is a major requirement of our positions as supervisors or managers that we halt these practices immediately.

I was recently in a medium-size gear cutting shop and observed the gentleman who had the job of refilling the coolant on

a horizontal hobbing machine doing his job. The tank was located at the rear of the machine, and while he was performing his job, the operator continued to run parts on the machine. This was a dangerous enough practice in itself, but to compound the problem the guard—which was intended to cover the drive belts, and was also located in the rear of the machine—had been left off. No one there seemed to know why the guard was off. Fortunately, no one was hurt that time, but you can imagine the consequences if something had happened. This was just an accident waiting to happen. Whether you’re an operator, maintenance man, supervisor, or manager, please be observant. Apply what guarding is available, and you may just save a fellow employee from a bad injury—or even worse.

Much too often, we all ignore unsafe practices that are in our power to correct. We can all make a conscientious effort to recognize and resolve these issues before anything unfortunate occurs. It really doesn’t take any extra time or effort; it just requires keeping an eye open and being willing to question unsafe conditions. No one wants to get hurt on the job, and most people are more than willing to help make conditions safer, both for themselves and their fellow employees. 📧

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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