

# terryMcDONALD

Member of the ANSI Subcommittee on Gear Safety

## SAFETY MATTERS

**With the rising cost of workman's compensation and medical insurance—and skyrocketing personal-injury claims—addressing safety concerns in advance is more important than ever before.**

Today, as I was having lunch, the television was on a station showing a half-hour newscast. During the course of this newscast there were three different advertisements for law firms promoting injury claims. I find this reason enough to renew my efforts to convince all of my fellow employers in the gear industry to please make that extra effort to limit personal injuries in our workplaces. I am sure that none of us wish to make the lawyers rich. From the number of law firms promoting personal injury cases, it is obvious that there must be way too many workers out there who are being injured on the job. I am convinced that we will never totally be without injuries, but if we can limit the amount of injuries, or even the severity, we will be ahead of the game.

Of course, another prime concern we all have is the escalating costs of our workman's comp insurance. The above paragraph indicates the reason the insurance companies are increasing the costs. There are also the escalating costs of the medical care required in the course of treating an injury. Since we are required by law to carry workman's comp on our employees, it has long been considered just a cost of doing business, and it is. However, the cost is rising at an alarming rate: I read recently in the *Wall Street Journal* that small shops were experiencing a one-third to one-half percent increase in costs, with some as much as a 100-percent increase. I think that we can all see that improving our own and our employee's vigilance in the safety aspects of our jobs will result in savings that we can all benefit from.

My purpose in writing this column is not to bring brand-new revelations that will magically make all the accidents go away, but to help remind all of us of things that we know but somehow let slip through the cracks. If this column helps one company prevent one injury, then it will be a success. If you've read my previous columns, you will realize that all I'm doing is trying to remind you of things you already know. The usual safety literature either promotes the sale of a device or service, or is written in such an esoteric manner that: 1) It is not interesting enough to read and digest, or; 2) It references sources that will require so much effort to find that it's easier to ignore it. I try to make this column readable, and by that I mean that I try to discuss safety in a conversational manner rather than taking a "you must do it this way" approach. I hope that a dialog of this sort helps make us all think of the safety aspects of our job and work environment from a positive standpoint


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rather than an "Oh gee, I have to do another stupid safety report" mentality.

How many of us simply read safety literature—OSHA, NIOSH, NFPA literature, and other similar items—that come across our desks with the attitude of: okay, now what do I have to do to keep from getting sued, fined, or otherwise inconvenienced? Unfortunately, too much of the literature is written in this vein. I think we need material that helps us realize that if we make just a few small changes, we will improve safety and decrease the chances of anyone being hurt. That, to me, is the important thing.

I hope you all are attending Gear Expo this year, since it's the premier show for our industry. As you look at all of the new equipment, I recommend that you look at it with an eye to safety. Does the machine reflect the

"state of the art" guarding and protections available? Does it have good easy access to the load/unload station? Is the coolant system well thought out? Are the controls accessible and well marked?

These things, and others like them, can make a big difference in the true value of a machine purchase. Of course, the machine has to perform, too, but don't ignore the safe operation aspects of a machine purchase. 

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

With more than 30 years of experience in the gear industry, Terry McDonald is a manager with Repair Parts, Inc., a partner with Re-New Machine & Maintenance, Inc., and a current member and past-chairman of the American National Standards Institute B11.11 Subcommittee on Safety Requirements for Construction, Care, and Use of Gear Cutting Equipment. McDonald writes this monthly column specifically for *Gear Solutions* magazine. He can be contacted through the magazine at [editor@gearsolutionsonline.com](mailto:editor@gearsolutionsonline.com). Responses and reactions to his column are also welcome.