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SAFETY MATTERS

When you're implementing your safety plan, document your procedures. When an injury occurs, document your response. And when you're considering your operation's procedures, view them all with an eye toward safety.

Last month we discussed data retrieval in this column. I thought it might help if we discussed what the courts would be looking for in the circumstance that we would have to defend our company in a safety-related suit. I sincerely hope that none of you ever have to defend yourselves in such a lawsuit, but you must be prepared just in case. Of course, this discussion can't cover all the possible things a plaintiff's attorney may request via discovery, but certain records must be kept, and kept current.

As a gear manufacturing facility, we must keep a complete and accurate record of any and all injuries that occur during any employee's working hours. Just as important is keeping the same records for any injuries occurring to visitors to our facilities. These records must, at a minimum, include the date and time of the injury, a very complete description of the injury, the steps taken for treatment of the injury, the results of the injury, a formal review of the cause of the injury, and the steps taken to prevent similar injuries in the future, as well as a review of safety procedures that were in place prior to the injury. This sounds like a lot of record keeping, but a simple database setup will enable you to enter and retain this information very easily.

One of the most important documents you can keep in each employee's file is verification that they've received and had the opportunity to read your company's safety handbook. This can be a separate document, or part of the handbook. If you haven't created such a document, it should be at the top of your priority list to do so. This document alone can save your company in the event of a lawsuit. It's also suggested that you maintain a file containing all of the operating instructions and safety documents furnished

with each of your machines. Your employee handbook should include instructions that the employee should read and understand prior to operating the machine. If you're not the first owner of the machine—as is the case with many of us—it is important that you obtain at least a copy of the original documentation for your machine. This will be valuable in the case of a lawsuit.

Two of the topics the magazine is covering this month are "tooling/workholding" and "tool sharpening." I have already discussed some of the safety issues with tool sharpening in previous columns,

but it doesn't hurt to review the issues.


Tools are sharp. That is what we accomplish by sharpening them and, as such, they must be handled with respect. Make sure that all of your employees are aware of the hazards and properly trained in the handling of sharpened tools.

Tools are dull... a contradiction? No, just a fact. When tools are dull, they not only

impact production, they present a very different safety hazard. When a tool is dull, it can create a greater amount of heat in the part being cut, as well as in the cutter itself. This heat can actually cause burns during the unloading process, or the tool-changing process. A dull tool also creates a different chip form that causes problems such as cuts when cleaning the parts, or the machine. Of course, a worse-case scenario is that the hob gets so hot that it breaks apart under the cutting forces and throws pieces that can cause serious injury, or even death. Training your employees to recognize a dull tool before it becomes a

hazard is the solution.

The major safety hazard concerning tooling/workholding is when it's not sufficiently designed to do the job. If the blanks are not

held securely, they can be thrown by the cutting pressure and, again, cause serious injury or death. Many of us are small operations that must adapt our tooling/workholding to a great number of parts. This can lead to dangerous conditions, and the articles that are included this month should be helpful—so read them with an eye toward safety. 

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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