SAFETY MATTERS

As the new year begins to unfold, it's time to review operating procedures to make sure that necessary production and maintenance activities are being conducted in a way that is safe for everyone involved.

Well, here we are already into the second month of 2005. How is our safety record so far? So often we all concentrate on production requirements for the new year—new budgets, equipment requirements, personnel changes—and we tend to forget that accidents and hazards never take a holiday.

It is that time of year; time to do our yearly preventative maintenance. Do the personnel doing maintenance on your equipment faithfully use the proper "lock-out, tag-out" procedures? Every year we hear of someone who was badly injured or even killed from failing to totally disable the machine on which they were performing repairs. I know from my own experience that people who are not familiar with a particular machine can "push the buttons" in an attempt to figure out what the machine does. If you are working on the machine in an area not easily seen from the operator station, you can be badly hurt if the machine starts unexpectedly. By simply being conscientious about applying the proper lock-out, tag-out procedures, these accidents can be prevented. Remember, electrical lockout is not the only area we have to be concerned with. Many of the gear cutting machines are hydraulically and/or pneumatically operated, and the systems can still have pressure behind them even though the pumps are not running. It is important that all of the personnel performing maintenance be instructed in the safe way to disable all motions of the equipment they are working on. It stands to reason, of course, that we as employers must furnish the proper equipment such as signs and locking devices to allow our personnel to work safely on the equipment.

Another thing to be concerned about when maintenance is being performed on our equipment is oil spills. We must insist that any oil spills be immediately cleaned up so that "slip and slide" dangers are not an issue. Again, it is important that mats, oil-dry, rags, and any other necessary cleaning materials be readily available. I have also seen various solvents and sprays being used in maintenance procedures without the proper protective gear being worn, whether by the personnel using the materials or those in the immediate vicinity.

The last thing I need to mention on this subject is the use of compressed air to clean the areas of the machine that work is being performed on. Compressed air at high velocity can cause damage to the machine by forcing debris past seals, but even more important are the real dangers caused by the flying debris—and not only to the person doing the cleaning, but also to any personnel in the area. Please stress to your employees that using compressed air to clean large areas of machines is simply too dangerous and should be avoided.

One of the topics covered this month is workholding. Safety is a prime consideration when designing, building, purchasing, or applying any workholding device. Of course, if the workpiece is not held sufficiently tight, the cut part may be scrap. Even more important, however, is the fact that under the cutting pressures and high speeds that today's machines maintain, workpieces can be thrown from the holding fixture. This is a very hazardous situation and must be one of the prime considerations when employing any workholding device. Another consideration must be the ease of loading and unloading a workholding device. We want to be aware of the reach of the operator and the safety of his extremities when loading or unloading parts. We must also remember that, after a part has been machined, there are often burrs and sharp edges that must be handled, and coolant residue can make the finished part hard to handle. We must look at our workholding devices from the perspective of safety so that accidents involving our employees are avoided.

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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. Responses and reactions to his column are also welcome.