

Food-processing equipment amputates worker's hand and forearm



On a December morning in 2006, Robert Frye (left), an employee at Golden Steer Choice Meats in Bellevue, was using a meat grinder when a jam developed in the hopper. As Robert used a piece of meat to push down on the blockage, it suddenly released, causing his hand and forearm to slip down the hopper throat and contact the moving auger.

How did this happen?

The opening to the grinder's auger was not guarded to prevent the employee's hand from entering the danger zone. Non-removable guards were not manufactured for this machine when it was purchased and put in place in the mid-1960's. Although a guard existed and the employee had been trained on proper use of the guard, it was not installed on the machine. A tool designed to safely push meat and other ingredients through the guard and hopper opening was missing. Furthermore, the employer stated that an inspection had not taken place since opening for business in 1968.

What can you do to prevent this from happening at your workplace?

- Take time to identify possible hazards in your workplace. Employees who use or clean food-processing equipment have a daily risk for contact with dangerous moving parts such as blades, rollers, presses, and augers.
- Learn and follow the Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) health and safety rules that apply to your business.

WISHA rules cover employee training, how to address proper machine guarding of equipment, when and how to safely de-energize machinery and other important approaches for preventing injuries.

Where can I get more food-processing safety information?

A "Blade Safety Tip Sheet for Food Processing" is available at our web site. Go to our homepage, <http://www.Lni.wa.gov>, and type in "Blade Safety" in the search box. Then click on "Blade Safety." There you'll find a two-page publication, "Cuts cut productivity and profits in food processing," which offers safety tips you can post at your work site.

You can find additional information and other safety rules that commonly apply to the food-processing industry by going to our home page and looking under "Business Links" and clicking on "Find a Safety Rule." Then click on "Rule Name" and select one of the following topics:

- Accident Prevention
- Machine Safety, Food Processing Equipment
- Lock-out/tag-out

What if I still need help?

Free consultation services are available at your request. For more information, or to contact a consultant in your area, visit www.SafetyConsultants.Lni.wa.gov or call 1-800-4BESAFE.

Read the employer's personal account of what happened

On December 14, 2006, Golden Steer Choice Meats learned older is not always better. My employee, a five-year veteran of the meat industry, lost his arm in our meat grinder. It was a large 10-horsepower machine built and installed around 1967. It was modern for its time -- a time when safety was not a concern.

It was around 9 a.m. and the talk around town was that there was big a storm coming -- high winds with possible power outages. Having a perishable product, we were concerned and preparing for the wind. What happened next was something I will never forget for the rest of my life.

Robert was assigned the task of grinding the hamburger for the day's business -- a job he loved to do and was experienced in doing. I was preparing the meat case and another employee was at the sink. The next sound we heard was Robert's high-pitched scream from the grinder area, "Oh my God!" I turned to see a young man walking towards me with his arm broken off just below the elbow, and two bones sticking out where his hand used to be.

With the grinder still running, Robert sat on the ground with Julie, a fellow employee, as she administered first aid. She held his bloody stump, trying to minimize the blood loss while he sat there rocking back and forth repeating over and over again, "I lost my arm..... I lost my arm..... I lost my arm....."

I remember calling 911. I was breathing fast and hard. The 911 operator gave us some simple directions on first aid and I passed those on to Julie. I was asked if there was any part of his arm that could be saved and I was directed to go look. I already knew the answer.

What came out of that old grinder was not an arm, but an education in safety, a respect for the machinery and tools used in our industry, a reminder that just because we always worked a certain way doesn't make it right. *We learned about safety by accident.*

One of Robert's biggest concerns was that he would not be able to return to his job. His passion is cutting meat, and he always wanted to be a meat cutter. The day after this accident, I told Robert that his job would be here for him when he was ready to come back.

He returned to work part time six weeks after the accident and full time after 12 weeks. People thought there was no way to cut meat one-handed. Robert proved them wrong. He does everything he did before, but now his place of employment is a safer place to do it.

By John Dick, owner, Golden Steer Choice Meats, Bellevue