

Unguarded Conveyor Tears Ligament in Teen's Thumb

Industry: Fruit and Vegetable Wholesalers

Release Date: April 12, 2011

Task: Stacking Boxes

Occupation: Laborer

An 18-year-old farm laborer tore a ligament in his thumb when an unguarded conveyor chain caught his glove and shirt sleeve and pulled his hand into the conveyor.

The employee was stacking full apple bins that were coming down a conveyor belt and had finished stacking one bin and was walking to get another. As he passed the front of the conveyor belt, the unguarded chain that operates the conveyor caught the worker's glove and sleeve. The victim was able to hit the emergency stop button before his hand was pulled into the sprocket, but not before injuring the ligaments in his thumb.

The victim began working for the company three days before he was injured. He spent a day in training reviewing tasks that were related to his job duties but was not told that the conveyor was suppose to have a guard. The mechanic who changed the chain on the conveyor had forgotten to replace the guard; the conveyor belt was unguarded the entire time the employee worked there. The guard was put back on the conveyor belt following the injury.

The injured worker was out of work for two weeks; when he returned to work he was unable to use his left hand. Four months after the incident, the worker continues to struggle with grabbing materials that are round and heavy. The worker expects to recover within another two to three months.



Employer Requirements

- Employers must provide safeguards for drive, tail, and idler sprocket pulleys where the chain creates a nip or shear point. See WAC 296-806-42036.
- Employers cannot remove, displace, damage, destroy, or carry off any safety device, safeguard, notice or warning that is furnished for use in the place of employment. See WAC 296-500-11010.

Recommendations

- Employees should be properly trained on how to use and recognize hazards on any equipment that they work with or around. Employees should not use or work around any machine they have not been trained on or are uncomfortable using.
- Ensure employees are familiar with all machine safety features, such as machine guards and emergency stop buttons.
- Inspect working areas before tasks are begun and address any identified hazard; in this case, ensure that all machine guards are in place.

Resources

- L&I offers a free online machine safeguarding course at <http://bit.ly/w4Bb8w>
- OSHA offers a free safeguarding equipment guide at <http://1.usa.gov/9AEIau>
- Free "Put this Guard Back" stickers are available from L&I at <http://1.usa.gov/yAixsS>

Need more information?

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