

Vocational woodshop laborer suffers partial thumb amputation while cutting board

Industry: Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Task: Cutting wood to length

Release Date: October 27, 2012

Occupation: Laborer

A 19-year-old vocational woodshop laborer cut off the tip of his left thumb while was using a chop saw that had its safety guard removed. The victim was cutting a board to length with the help of a co-worker when the incident occurred. It was the co-workers job to load and slide boards into place in preparation for cutting. While the victim was cutting one board, his co-worker attempted to slide another board into place, bumping the board being cut. The bumping resulted in the victim's hand sliding underneath the unguarded spinning saw blade. The blade then tore the employee's gloved hand and cut off the tip of his thumb.

The victim had worked part-time for his employer for two years prior to becoming a fulltime employee during the past year. The victim stated that he had been trained by his employer in the proper use of this saw, as well as the shop's many other woodworking machines. It was a routine procedure that when new machines were brought into the shop, employees were trained in their proper use.

The training included watching videos and taking a tour of the facility. Since this injury, the employer has put safety guards on all the woodshop's saws.

The employee was out of work for approximately two months; he continues to struggle in adjusting to life with a partially amputated thumb since doctors were unable to reattach the cut-off portion. Now more than six months since the injury, the victim still suffers pain in his thumb, has difficulty picking things up, and continues having nightmares about the event.



Unguarded chop saw

Employer Requirements

- It shall be the responsibility of management to establish, supervise, and enforce, in a manner which is effective in practice, a safe and healthful working environment. See WAC 296-78-515(1.a.).
- Employees must be protected from hazards created by the point of operation by using one or more safeguarding methods. See WAC 296-806-20028.
- All employees shall be in the clear before starting operation of drag or swing cut-off saws. See WAC 296-78-575

Recommendations

- Inspect all power tools before using to ensure all safety guards are present. Never use power tools and saws that are not properly guarded.
- Keep your hands a safe distance away from a moving saw blade at all times when cutting wood. Ensure everyone around you knows that you are using the machine.
- If you are completing a task with a co-worker that involves powered equipment, ensure good verbal communication both before and during the task being performed.
- Operators of power tools and saws should always read the owner's manual prior to use. Owner/Operator manuals will provide descriptions of all safety features.

Resources

- Thompson Rivers University offers a free miter saw safety guide at: <http://www.tru.ca/hsafety/workinglearningsafely/work/chopsaw.html>
- Check out the "chop saw" education curriculum provided by CTE online at: www.cteonline.org/portal/default/.../Viewer/Curriculum?
- Free workplace safety and health consultations are available from L&I at: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Basics/Assistance/Consultation/>

Need More information?

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