



Bark and Mulch Blower Systems Can Kill Operators

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Attention: Businesses and job crews who use truck-mounted mulch or bark blower systems

Truck-mounted systems used to blow mulch, bark, aggregate, and other landscaping materials **have killed two workers and seriously injured a third in separate incidents.** All incidents occurred shortly after workers climbed or fell into the truck hopper (cargo area) while the exposed mechanical equipment was running.

The truck hopper interior is typically classified as a permit-required confined space.

To prevent these kinds of deadly incidents at your job sites:

- Before work begins, use the manufacturer's safety instructions and prohibitions in addition to applicable safety rules to develop work procedures for clearing jams and other potentially hazardous tasks.
- Establish lockout-tagout procedures for opening the rear hatch (tailgate) of the truck, to ensure hydraulic and other stored energy can't suddenly release, cause the hatch to fall, and hurt workers below.
- Train crews so they know the hopper interior is considered a permit-required confined space and that entry exposes them to hazards of moving belts, shafts, and augers that can trap and amputate body parts, crush, or kill. They'll also need additional required safety training including how to select, properly set-up, and use appropriate pushing tools, safe ladders or scaffolds, PPE, and when applicable, fall protection.
- Should entry become necessary, use permit-required confined space entry procedures that address lockout-tagout of mechanical and hydraulic stored energy, any possible engulfment hazards from material inside the hopper, and other safety precautions such as provision and use of fall protection, when applicable.
- Ensure low-literacy and non-English speaking employees understand all written safety procedures and verbal instructions to prevent similar tragic incidents.



Danger zone! Do not enter the hopper or use hands or any part of your body to clear jams or move materials. Even slow-moving mechanical parts like the rotating shaft and augers shown here, have killed or maimed workers that entered hoppers.

In addition to mechanical dangers of the work, employers need to identify and address all site-specific hazards as part of their **required** Accident Prevention Program (APP), PPE assessment, and, when applicable, other safety programs.

Youth under age 18 are not permitted to operate this or other powered machinery or equipment.

Get 1-on-1 assistance from L&I or visit L&I's Safety & Health webpage for training, videos, and other resources to help strengthen your safety program.

Share this bulletin with others in your industry and safety network.

*This bulletin was developed by L&I's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) to alert employers, labor groups, and employees to potential hazards associated with work activities. **This is not a rule and creates no new legal obligations.** The information provided includes suggested guidance on how to avoid workplace hazards and describes relevant mandatory safety and health rules. DOSH recommends you also check related rules for additional requirements.*

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