Gain Control of New Equipment and Machines

What’s at Stake?

Every now and then you will come face-to-face with a new piece of equipment or new machine at work, or something slightly different from what we are trained on and used to using. The areas for potential problems will vary significantly with the equipment involved, but usually a few basic rules apply.

What’s the Danger?

Never assume new equipment and machines are just like the old ones. Chances are they aren’t. They might be faster, more complex, and largely unfamiliar. That’s why training is critical! You need to become acquainted with new equipment and machines before you can safely use them.

EXAMPLE

The driver of a garbage truck was on a highway, heading to the last stop of his shift. He was working overtime, so he was driving one of the other trucks in the fleet and had a different route. Investigators believe the driver had intended to flick the” open door” switch before he arrived at his next stop.

He was used to the switch being in the first position on the panel. On this vehicle, however, it was in the third position. The switch in the first position on this vehicle raised the garbage box. When the garbage box hit the side of a pedestrian overpass, the overpass fell onto the cab of the truck. The driver was fatally crushed.

How to Protect Yourself

When you switch machines or get new equipment, you need to deal with different control layouts, operating procedures, and other design differences. These differences can be significant safety concerns if you don’t fully understand new operating instructions and all safety precautions.

Here are 10 points to keep in mind when using new machinery:

1. No matter what the piece of equipment or machine is, read the operator’s manual.
2. Take advantage of any instruction offered by the manufacturer’s representative or a trainer.
3. Be sure you understand both the start-up and shut-down procedures.
    - Even if the equipment looks the same, the procedures could be radically different from before.
4. Familiarize yourself with the controls and be sure to note how they differ from what you’re used to.
    - Do they operate the way you expect them to?
    - Are they where you expect them to be?
5. Learn how the guards work and how they should be secured.
6. Identify all energy sources on the new equipment, such as electrical, pneumatic or hydraulic.
    - There may be more than one.
    - Learn all lockout procedures associated with the new equipment.
7. Learn the new maintenance procedures.
    - When is maintenance required/what is the maintenance schedule?
    - What maintenance records are you required to keep?
8. Learn about any chemical or atmospheric hazards associated with the new equipment and how to protect yourself against these hazards.
9. Learn the signs that might indicate problems in the new machine or equipment.
    - Ask for a trouble-shooting checklist and know who to call in case of malfunction.

10. Never assume all new machines and equipment are safe.
    - Engineers and purchasing managers can make mistakes and they likely don’t know your job as well as you do.
    - Your evaluation is important in making sure the equipment is right for the job, safely assembled, and properly guarded.

Final Word

New equipment and machinery can make your job easier, but it can also put you in danger. Follow the 10 tips and always put safety first when operating something new or different.