Hand Tools: Power vs Manual — Safe Use, PPE and Maintenance Fatality File

Young Worker Caught in Vertical Edger Saw Blades at Missouri Sawmill

Summary of Incident

On January 11, 2023, a young worker at a sawmill in Missouri was fatally injured after becoming caught in the vertical edger blades of a saw. The worker was operating in close proximity to unguarded rotating blades when the contact occurred. OSHA was notified and opened a workplace fatality investigation.

Investigation

OSHA inspected the sawmill following the fatality and issued the employer a hazard letter requiring corrective action to protect employees from amputation and entanglement hazards on the equipment. When OSHA returned to the facility on March 1, 2023, inspectors found the hazardous condition had not been corrected and the exposed saw remained in use, leading to additional citations and enforcement action.

Key Hazards Demonstrated by the Incident

The case illustrates the three patterns OSHA cites most frequently in power-tool and machine-blade fatalities. First, missing or removed guarding on rotating blades remains the leading mechanical cause of caught-in and amputation deaths. Second, lack of pre-use inspection and tag-out of defective or improperly guarded tools enables continued exposure. Third, employer failure to act on documented hazard letters and corrective-action notices is a recurring factor in repeat fatalities at the same site. Machine Guarding (29 CFR 1910.212) is consistently among OSHA’s most-cited

standards for this reason.

Takeaways

Inspect every hand and power tool before each shift and tag out anything with damaged cords, cracked guards, dull blades, or modified controls. Never remove or bypass a guard. Match the right tool, blade, and wheel to the task — and replace consumables before they fail. Wear the PPE rated for the tool: ANSI Z87 eye and face protection, hearing protection, cut-resistant gloves where appropriate, and snug-fitting clothing.

Source: https://ohsonline.com/