No Lockout Brings Death, Big Fine

A nightshift worker died because a giant mixer was not locked out. The needless fatality brought a $265,000 fine against the company.

Vitafoam Products Canada Limited from Toronto, ON, recently pleaded guilty to violating the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The plea stems from a 2004 incident in a foam product manufacturing plant, where a worker was killed.

The worker entered a giant mixer (with auger-like blades) to replace a pipe. Prior to entering the machine, he turned it off with a master key on an operating panel. But a second worker, unaware that anyone was inside the mixer, turned it back on.

A Ministry of Labour investigation found that the mixer had not been locked out. There was also no notification that anyone had entered the machine. Officials revealed there were no devices or mechanisms to automatically disconnect the power when someone was inside the mixer. In addition, the company did not have a supervisor on duty at the time of the incident.

The ministry reported the company was in the process of installing a device to ensure the mixer could not be turned on while someone was inside it. But it was too late for the victim.

The company pleaded guilty to failing to:

- Lock out the mixer controls with a lock
- Disconnect all power sources before entry
- Ensure the master key was taken by the worker entering the mixer
- Lock out all computer controls prior to entry
- Provide clear notice to all workers whenever someone was inside the mixer
- Provide adequate training on lockout procedures
- Provide training on the need to inspect the mixer before starting it

- Provide nightshift supervision