Unsafe Practice Kills Worker

An unsafe practice that was allegedly encouraged by his employer resulted in a 52-year-old man losing his life in December 2005. Gordon Lewis Cecil, a married man with four children, died after attempting to unclog a jammed wood chipper at a Boise Cascade plant in Umatilla, OR.

Cecil and a co-worker had been using a log to clear the machine. When they heard the clog release, Cecil ran out of the way. A heavy piece of wood flew out the machine and struck him in the back of the head. He died at the scene.

Described as “a true friend to all who knew him,” Cecil loved hunting, fishing and spending time with his family.

“Plant management encouraged the practice of unclogging the chipper while (it was) running with the hood guard open as the fastest method of removing a clog without delaying production,” according to Oregon’s Occupational Safety and Health Division, (OR-OSHA).

A bypass switch had been installed to defeat the chipper’s safety system. OROSHA has proposed $70,000 in civil penalties for each of two alleged willful violations ? failure to supervise workers properly and installing a switch that bypassed a safety feature on machinery. Additionally, it has proposed a $2,500 fine for the company’s alleged failure to instruct workers on how to shut down the machine to protect themselves from sudden start-ups.

Boise Cascade is appealing the citations because it disagrees with OROSHA’s claim that the violations were willful.