

Safety and health alert

40/99 Steel block ejected from power press

Incident

During July 1999 in Welshpool, a fettler working in a foundry received serious injuries to the head and face when struck by a steel block that was ejected from an hydraulic power press he was operating. A steel mesh guard fitted to the front of the press failed to stop the block from hitting the operator but reduced the impact sufficiently to prevent him from receiving injuries that would almost certainly have been fatal.

The fettler had been directed to use the power press to straighten twisted steel castings. He was using steel blocks of various shapes to apply pressure to specific areas of the castings. He was not instructed how to conduct the work and used steel blocks that had been left at the press by other employees.

The fettler was removed to hospital but has since been released and is expected to make a full recovery.

Factors

1. The steel blocks being used to straighten the casting were not square and pressure was being applied to a tapered edge that was only in contact with the very edge of the ram of the press. There was also evidence that the blocks had been used previously in the upright position, which would have made them less stable under pressure
2. The edges of the steel casting being straightened were rounded in the area where pressure was being applied.
3. The injured fettler had received little training in the use of power presses and none in respect to the unit he was operating at the time of the accident.
4. There was little or no supervision of semi skilled employees who were being required to operate potentially hazardous plant.

Recommendations

1. Tapered blocks and rounded edges should never be subjected to high pressure when used in association with hydraulic power presses.
2. Guards should be provided to the front, back and sides of power presses and should not only prevent access to the hazard area, but should also be capable of stopping objects that may be ejected.
3. Persons required to operate power presses and other plant must receive appropriate training and instruction (as well as adequate supervision if only semi skilled).

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site

www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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