ENERGY SAFETY CANADA

SAFETY ALERT

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Eye Injury During Routine Maintenance

What happened?

A mulcher unit was clearing a right-of-way during pipeline construction when an electrical issue caused a breakdown. A mechanic was called to the work site and diagnosed the problem.

Once the electrical issue was identified and repaired, the mechanic helped the mulcher operator replace worn teeth on the unit so it could return to service. The work was conducted in cold conditions.

The operator and mechanic successfully replaced over 30 teeth using a hammer and chisel to pry the worn teeth loose.

The workers continued removing worn teeth until the mechanic was struck in the eye with a piece of metal debris.

The operator provided immediate first aid and the mechanic was flown to a hospital for specialized emergency care.

Why did it happen?

Completing this task with a hammer and chisel was considered routine and effective, and the workers believed they identified all hazards and applied effective controls before starting work.

The use of striking tools, like a hammer and chisel, can create flying debris. While this hazard was identified, the mechanic wore safety glasses with no face shield as the task had been successfully completed without one many times in the past.

The company's safe work procedure and Job Safety Analysis (JSA) required both safety glasses and a face shield be worn when removing mulcher unit teeth, but neither were reviewed before work started.

What did they learn?

An original equipment manufacturer (OEM) tool for removing worn mulcher teeth was available on site, but the mulcher guard units, coupled with the frozen, muddy conditions, made the OEM tool less effective and more difficult to use.

The company's safe work procedures and JSA were communicated to all employees with reference to the identified hazards, applicable controls and PPE requirements. Emphasis was placed on the requirement for pre-job hazard assessments, including reviewing and/or updating safe work procedures or JSAs before starting work.

Ask yourself or your crew:

Could something like this happen on our work site?

What actions could have been taken before starting work?

How do we identify and select the best tools for a task?

How does tool selection/use affect task safety?

How can we recognise when a task is becoming more dangerous than originally anticipated?

What else can we learn from this incident?

Industry Resources

- Energy Safety Canada: Are You in the Line of Fire?
- Energy Safety Canada: Energy Wheel

Help industry by sharing lessons learned from an incident. Submit your Safety Alert.
