Older Worker Safety: Experience Counts—So Do the Risks Fatality File



Older Sawmill Supervisor Fatally Caught in Auger While Unclogging Woodchipper

In August 2023, a 67-year-old sawmill supervisor with about 20 years of experience at Phenix Lumber Co. in Phenix City, Alabama, was killed while trying to clear a difficult-to-reach area of a woodchipper. To access the jam, he climbed on top of an auger beneath the machine. While he was on the auger, the equipment unexpectedly started up, pulling him into the moving parts. He was fatally injured in the machinery.

An OSHA investigation found that the employer had multiple serious safety failures, including:

- Not ensuring workers used energy control (lockout/tagout) procedures before clearing jams
- Allowing work on machinery without de-energizing it
- Inadequate machine guarding on equipment with severe amputation and caught-in hazards
- Failing to properly train employees on the energy control program

OSHA cited the company for 22 willful, one repeat, and five serious violations and proposed nearly $2.5 million in penalties.

This case clearly shows how highly experienced, older workers are still at extreme risk when employers rely on “know-how” instead of strict safety controls—especially during maintenance, troubleshooting, and jam-clearing tasks.

Source: Osha.gov