Rotating Brush Kills Carwash Supervisor



A 23-year-old supervisor lost his life to a rotating sidearm brush while cleaning the floor of an older mechanized carwash. The young man turned the working arms and brushes on to increase the pressure of his wash-down hose. This was not a recommended procedure and the owner reported being unaware of this dangerous practice carried out by the new employee.

The company had safety procedures in place with training, meetings and printed procedures for employees to follow, which the young man had received. However, the 30-year-old machinery did not have posted lockout/tagout instructions, which might have saved his life.

While he was cleaning the tunnel floor, the rotating sidearm activated and knocked the victim to the ground with his legs entangled in the sidearm. His boss noticed that the machinery was running, though no cars were being washed, and found him in this position. The proprietor called 911 and the victim was reported to have died of head and neck trauma.

The employer should have done an audit and inspection of the supervisor's actions while he carried out his duties. The mechanical equipment should have had lockout keys so that employees could not endanger themselves around machinery that should not have been running during maintenance. The old carwash system's safety features should also have been updated.

Source: California Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program, Case Report 05CA004