Wood Chipper Safety Fatality File



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A 19-year-old North Carolina teen was killed after being pulled feet first into a woodchipper (see news report). It was his first day on the job. Self-feeding mobile wood chippers commonly used during tree trimming operations consist of a feed mechanism, knives mounted on a rotating chipper disc or drum, and a power plant. Tree branches and trunk sections fed manually into the machine□s infeed hopper are grabbed by the feed mechanism or chipper knives. The chipper disc or drum, rotating between 1,000 and 2,000 rpm, cuts and propels wood chips through the discharge spout usually into a chip truck. The housing containing the chipper disc or drum is sectioned and includes a removable hood that allows access to machine components for maintenance.

The hazards of working with woodchippers are well known and practical methods exist for preventing fatalities. Links to various resources are provided below.

In addition to the hazards of working with this dangerous machinery, we know that certain worker characteristics □such as being an immigrant/foreign-born worker, a worker under the age of 25, or an employee of a small business□can increase an individual□s risk for workplace injury or illness. We also know that temporary workers face additional risks (see Addressing the Hazards of Temporary Employment). Employers need to have safety and health programs that ensure workers are appropriately trained and supervised before they work with hazardous equipment, such as wood chippers.

At 19, this young man was not prohibited from working with this dangerous piece of machinery. Unfortunately, work-related fatalities involving wood chippers have occurred among young people