

Pressman's Toolbox: Safety: It's everyone's responsibility

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As I was repairing a newspaper press this past week, I heard the phrase made popular by every black-and-white movie ever made about the newspaper industry: Stop the press!

Only this time, it was a scream.

A press operator's arm was caught inside the folder.

The operator was trying to remove some newspapers that were causing an irregular delivery of finished copies. His arm was pulled so far into the device that it was impossible to remove it without causing him additional pain.

Eventually, he was freed, but not for 90 minutes and not until someone equipped with an acetylene torch cut away the parts of the folder that had enveloped the operator's arm.

How did the press operator find himself trapped?

He was just putting into practice a technique taught to him by another pressman who had shown him how to remove papers while the press was running.

Safety is everyone's responsibility - especially management's.

After all, it's (some, not all) management that hires individuals without making sure they are trained adequately. Instead they expect more-experienced operators to teach the new hires how to operate the press.

Wrong thought! It is important for management to insist that safety practices be used and to provide the proper safety equipment to do the job. It is also important for management to make and review a list of safety practices pressmen must follow.

The number one rule? "Never, never, never remove anything from the press, or make internal adjustments to the machine, while the press is running!"

Operators have a responsibility to keep themselves safe, even if the managers for whom they work don't share the same philosophy. With this in mind, here are some important safety and operational practices to remember:

- Never remove anything from the press while the press is running - especially paper.

- Never make any internal adjustment to the press while the press is running, such as adjusting ink or dampener rollers, ink pickup rollers, iron to iron adjustments or folder delivery belt adjustments.
- Do not run the press without press guards. Make sure all press guards are in place before the press moves. I know personally of two incidents where pressmen have lost the skin from their hands - de-gloved actually - after they fell against an operating press. Many times pressmen remove the guards because they feel they are too inconvenient to use or they believe the guards are in the way when it is time to make adjustments. A guard should never be removed for any reason except while the press is stopped. You can modify the guards to permit access to rollers when the press is stopped, but never adjust ink or water rollers while the machine is running.
- Do not permit operators with long hair to operate a press without ensuring that their hair is encased in a net, cap or other protective device. I know of several occasions where press operators have lost hair and parts of their scalp after getting caught in parts of the press.
- Do not let operators dangle rags or wear loose clothing that can be caught in the press.
- Do not let operators place their hands near the RTF while the press is moving. I know of more than one instance where a pressman has lost the ends of his fingers because of an uncovered setscrew in the RTF. The setscrew holes should be filled, however, operators still must keep their hands away from the device while the press is running.
- Do not let operators reach in areas where lead-in rollers are still spinning after the press has come to a stop.
- Do not try to correct the paper flow while the press is running, especially around the folder nips. The paper is very strong and will pull an operator's fingers into the nips.
- Make sure no one is learning or using bad safety practices.
- Make sure adequate decking, permanent ladders, ladder doors and deck rails are installed on press units and folder.

I also believe that safety equipment is very important and should not be overlooked. The appropriate safety equipment should be used for the task at hand such as:

- Hats or other hair protection if the employee insists on long hair.
- Gloves for hot objects or rough material that will cut the hands.
- Rubber gloves to protect the skin when washing blankets, press parts or anything else that could cause a skin irritation.
- Safety glasses or goggles to prevent solvent or other debris from being splashed into the eyes.

- Tyvek suits to prevent solvents from reaching the skin while cleaning the machine.
- Ear plugs to avoid hearing loss.
- Canister-style facemasks to reduce the risk of breathing noxious chemicals.
- Dust masks to limit the amount of paper lint and ink mist that can be inhaled.
- Fire extinguishers should be in plain sight and readily available. A comprehensive fire suppression system, other than a sprinkler system, should also be considered as well. It is not always possible to contain a fire with a fire extinguisher. The cost of the suppression system is definitely cheaper than the damage that can be caused by a fire.
- Lockout devices and tags should be available and used whenever it is time to service the press. It only takes a few minutes to lock and tag the machine. It only takes a second to lose your life because you didn't make the machine safe.
- Eyewash devices should be easily accessible and close to areas where hazardous chemical are being used. The quicker a person can get these chemicals washed out of his eyes the less damage that will be done.
- Flammable materials should be stored in a metal cabinet. The materials should be clearly marked to prevent accidental use of the wrong substance.
- Finally, make sure you check your safety review list weekly to ensure that everything is up to date with your particular pressroom.

Providing new employees with safety procedures and making sure they know when and how to use safety equipment is the best way to prevent accidents. Make sure you continue to retrain your current employees at least once a year to make sure they don't become complacent and take safety for granted.

If you have any questions or comments that will help press operators remain safe, please share them with me and I will pass them on to my readers. The only way to improve safety is by committing to it.

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