

Yes, Another Lockout Story . . .

I relate this incident in some detail as the lessons here are very important and have wide-ranging applicability.

Two field technicians, Mike and Pat (not their real names), from a well-known international downstream equipment manufacturer were installing upgrades to an ISS. Mike was the lead man and I was told later that Pat was in his learning stage. Pat was inside the ISS installing ports while Mike and I stood outside talking. Mike explained what they were doing in some detail. I asked “where” they had this machine locked out. Todd said, “They (meaning the host employer) have it locked out over there.” The “they” in this statement bothered me at the time, but since I wasn’t sure of the specific lockout procedure for this piece of equipment I thought I’d wait and see what was required.

I walked down and over and up to the eddy currents. Here, there were two LOTO padlocks with tags on the main power shutoff belonging to maintenance mechanics employed by the host employer. Mike and Pat had no locks here, yet they were both inside the ISS. I walked back over to the ISS to talk with them. I began to ask Mike about LOTO and Pat walked up, so I told them both the same thing. I asked Mike if he knew about LOTO, and he sort of hung his head and said he did. He clearly knew that he SHOULD have locked out the ISS, but he was relying on the host employer to take care of it. Mike and Pat were very receptive in listening to what I had to say about lockout. Pat said he forgot. Mike admitted that he simply didn’t do it.

I related the incident of the man at the aluminum processor a few weeks ago in Tennessee that got in to a shredder without it being locked out and got shredded. It so happens Mike was in Tennessee when that occurred and was familiar with this tragedy. We talked at length about the need for lockout. I said it’s not fair for them to put their lives in the hands of anyone else. That is, relying on someone else’s lockout. Both men were very gracious in receiving what I said to them. I do believe they will never forget the time somebody else’s safety guy talked to them about lockout. My hope is they will never again fail to properly lockout a piece of equipment they’re working on.

And what is the host employer’s part in this story? They should have a written Contractor Safety Policy that clearly states they expect onsite contractors to use and abide by the same policies and procedures they have for their own workers. Have a short meeting with contractors BEFORE they begin work on the property. Discuss hazards, traffic, PPE, and every other hazard and requirement that applies to them. Get them to sign a sign-in sheet just like after every other safety meeting. Then, go out and make sure they’re doing what they were told.

In the case of these guys, they put their locks on while I was there. Good for them. If you have contractors who knowingly ignore your safety rules. Fire them and hire someone else.

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