

CASE STUDY: Failure to Report a Machine Modification

SITUATION:

An operator at a customer's plant "jogged" himself into a machine using a jog button that had been added to the machine by the customer, unbeknownst to the machinery manufacturer. The operator lost his index and middle finger in the accident.

Over a year prior to the accident, one of the machinery manufacturer's salesmen was visiting the customer. The customer had over 30 machines from this particular manufacturer. During the course of the visit, the salesman and a customer representative took a walk through the plant. They never stopped at any particular machine for any length of time.

During the course of the subsequent lawsuit, the attorney for the injured party stated that since the salesman did not raise any concerns about the "added" jog button during his walk through the plant, he must have thought it was OK for it to be there. If he thought that the jog button was OK, then the manufacturing company as a whole thought it was OK. By the salesman not saying anything about the jog button, the manufacturing company, in essence, caused the accident.

SOLUTION:

It was proven during trial that had the jog button not been added by the customer, the accident could not have happened. The jog button as originally supplied by the manufacturer would not have allowed the operator to reach into the area of the machine that caused that accident.

Furthermore, it was shown that the salesman had no knowledge of the jog button that was added by the customer. During the "walk" through the plant over a year earlier, they had not stopped at any particular machine and had not done reviews or safety checks of any machines.

LESSON LEARNED:

Anytime a representative of your company visits a customer location, if they notice anything awry on machinery you manufacture, it is imperative that those concerns are brought to the attention of your contact at the customer location. A report of those concerns, and who they were reported to, should be made and filed when you return to your company. Lastly, a follow-up letter should be sent to your customer contact and filed at your company.