

7 lockout/tagout mistakes and how to avoid them

1) Not preparing machine-specific procedures

A repairman at an auto parts supplier was crushed to death when a robotics station restarted accidentally. Failure to use energy control procedures was one of many violations imposed by OSHA against the firm.

OSHA requires you to formally document the proper way to lockout and tagout all machinery energy sources.

Prepare instructions and necessary diagrams, checklists, pictures, or graphics on how to shut down and isolate hazardous energy sources for each specific machine. Show how to install and remove proper locks and tags. Then apply permanent, approved labels and tags at every energy control point.



Document lockout/tagout procedures for each piece of equipment.

2) Foregoing training or auditing

Lack of training in proper lockout/tagout procedures was one of several violations brought by OSHA against a Chicago container manufacture after four separate reports of worker amputations and broken bones.

Training on proper lockout/tagout procedures is vital. OSHA requires annual training at minimum for machine maintainers, operators, third-party service crews, and others who walk the floor. Each has specific responsibilities and must understand them in detail. Other factors, such as new job assignments, require the retraining of employees.

Likewise, OSHA requires at least one documented annual audit to monitor compliance, help you uncover short-comings, and make corrections.



Don't skip the training and auditing of your procedures.

3) Taking shortcuts for quick repairs

Don't let simple repairs lead to risky shortcuts, such as skipping lockouts or relying on interlocks. Deadly mistakes can occur.

Train employees to follow proper procedures on every repair. One purpose of interlocks is to stop machines when body parts, such as hands, overreach a safe area. They're not designed to protect you when making repairs or relieving jams since they can reset unexpectedly, be unreliable, or fail.



Quick repairs can turn into serious injuries when you don't follow procedures.

4) Failing to cut off all energy sources

A 52 year old welder was killed when stored up energy in a shredder suddenly closed a hydraulic door after he removed a jam.

Stored energy comes in many forms and can be hazardous. Hot liquids, gases, and toxic chemicals stay trapped in lines. Batteries remain charged when the main power is cut. Disassemble a valve or unjam a gate and you suddenly release dangerous forces. Identify all power sources. Label them clearly. Document the proper way to drain lines, block or restrain pressurized assemblies, disconnect linkages, and the like.



Stored energy can be lethal if not considered.

5) Not controlling lockout keys

Never leave keys in installed locks for fear of losing them.

Keep duplicates and master keys under tight control or eliminate them. Otherwise, well-meaning coworkers may accidentally use them to unlock devices under repair.



Best practice is one key, and only one key, per lock.

6) Misusing tags and locks

Don't use "Danger Do Not Operate" or similar tags for purposes other than energy control.

Same goes for using lockouts for non-energy applications, such as locking a food cabinet. Don't diminish their critical importance and violate OSHA requirements by using them for other purposes.



Use your locks and tags for their intended purpose, nothing else.

7) Not working under your own lock

Never work under another person's lock or ask someone to work under your labeled lock.

Take full responsibility of your own safety and don't jeopardize others since your lives may depend on it.



Work under your own lock, no one else's.

For more information:

- OSHA interactive training [program](#)
- Helpful [FAQ's](#)
- Audit [checklist](#)