



HAZARD SUMMARY

In December 2013, an experienced worker sustained a serious hand injury while clearing snow from a walkway. The snowblower (Figure 1) had become clogged with snow and the injury occurred when the worker reached inside the chute in an attempt to clear the obstruction. The Power Take-Off (PTO) had not been disengaged before leaving the tractor to clear the chute and the safety system interlock incorporated into the tractor seat was not maintained as per manufacturer's recommendations.

This is the second PEI workplace incident in recent years in which serious hand injuries were caused by removing snow from snowblowers. In the earlier incident, the worker also left the cab of the snowblower without disengaging the PTO and reached into the chute with his hand to clear clogged snow.



Figure 1. Snowblower involved in the incident

LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

On Prince Edward Island, workplace safety is the law. Legislated requirements under PEI's Occupational Health and Safety Act related to this hazard alert include:

- Section 12(1)(c) of the Occupational Health & Safety Act states, "An employer shall ensure that such information, instruction, training, supervision and facilities are provided as are necessary to ensure the occupational health and safety of the workers."
- Section 30(3)(1) of the Occupational Health & Safety General Regulations states, "The employer shall ensure that machinery is erected, installed, assembled, started, operated, used, handled, stored, stopped, serviced, tested, adjusted, maintained, repaired and dismantled in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications."
- Section 30(6)(3) of the Occupational Health & Safety General Regulations states, "The employer shall ensure that an employee has been adequately trained in lockout procedures for the particular situation."

RECOMMENDED PRECAUTIONS

All employers and workers who work with snowblowers including self-employed operators, are advised to take the following precautions:

- Before servicing or clearing a snowblower, park the equipment securely and ALWAYS shut off power to the equipment. Allow an additional five seconds for blades to stop rotating after the power is shut off, and be aware of possible stored energy still left in the equipment that may suddenly release when an obstruction is cleared from the blades or chute.
- Always be alert when working around snowblowing equipment and NEVER place hands down chute or around blades.
- Use an appropriate tool to unclog snow from rotating parts (Figures 2 and 3).
- Employers must advise workers of the hazards of the job task and ensure workers are properly trained to do the job safely.
- Equipment must be operated and maintained according to manufacturer's recommendations. NEVER remove or alter safety guards or devices and be aware of all warning labels (Figure 4).



Figure 2. Example of a chute-clearing tool.



Figure 3. Common household snowblower with chute-clearing tool attached.

Whether at work or at home, using large or small snowblowing equipment, these safety precautions are applicable. Becoming familiar with the hazards associated with using the equipment and knowing how to stay protected from those hazards will help reduce the risk of an injury.



Figure 4. Sample warning label.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Workers Compensation Board website at www.wcb.pe.ca, or contact the WCB Occupational Health & Safety Division at 902-368-5680 or 1-800-237-5049 (Toll free in Atlantic Canada).

To report a serious workplace incident or hazard,
call the 24Hr OHS Emergency Line at 902-628-7513