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By Charles Sughroe



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Saw Mill Boilers and Machinery

BY CYRAL AINSWORTH, DIRECTOR OF BUREAU INSPECTOR, DEPT. OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY

The saw mill, particularly the portable saw mill, is one of the problems today in the work of the Department of Labor and Industry. A portable saw mill operates a boiler and dangerous machinery, and as men are employed at these mills, they are classed as establishments and are therefore subject to inspection of the plant and the boilers.

Owing to their remote locations, we were glad to have an invitation from Mr. J. A. Rose, of the Pennsylvania Threshermen and Farmer's Mutual Casualty Insurance Company, to contribute an article for the RIGHT OF WAY, which we felt would reach many operators of saw mills quickly where otherwise it might be months before they were located by our men.

Most of the saw mills operate by steam and use a locomotive type boiler. Many of the boilers are used during the summer for threshing and at other seasons for the saw mills. Under the law on boilers, these boilers, so long as they are used for threshing or other purposes on the farm, are not subject to inspection. But, just so soon as they are used for other purposes, such as saw mills, road work or any other work not farm work, then they become subject to the State inspection law.

**What Law Requires**  
This law requires one internal and external inspection annually (generally termed an internal inspection) while the boiler is not under pressure, and one external inspection while under operating conditions annually. The law also requires every boiler to have an operating certificate, which must be kept by the boiler. The law provides fees of \$6.50 for the internal inspection, \$2.50 for the external inspection, and \$1.00 for the annual certificate. These fees, except the certificate fee, are only collected when the inspections are made by State boiler inspectors. Boilers insured in casualty insurance companies are inspected by employees of those companies, who are examined and commissioned by the Department of Labor and Industry. The boiler owner should always demand the boiler inspector's credentials, and if he has no credential issued by the Department the inspection is not recognized and no certificate can be issued.

Owners of boilers which are used for agricultural work part of the year and on other work the balance of the year, should be careful to have the boiler inspected before starting it up on other than agricultural work. If the boiler is not insured in a company whose inspectors are accredited by the Department, then a request should be made upon the Department of Labor and Industry for the inspection. These requests should give definitely the location of the boiler, and state whether or not the owner will be at the location. The boiler should be prepared for inspection by having the water drained from the boiler, removing the man hole and hand hole plates and thoroughly cleaning the boiler and its setting. Internally fired boilers should have the grate bars removed. This saves time in the inspection.

**When Explosions Occur**  
It is a fact that saw mill boilers show evidences of greater neglect than almost any others found. This is probably due to the idleness of the boiler during a portion of the year and lack of protection from the weather and corrosion. It is a further fact that the only explosions that have occurred in fire tube boilers in the past ten years have been saw mill boilers, and the cause has been due to neglect in operation. Regular inspection of boilers helps to keep them in better condition, as it shows up defects. If repairs are made promptly, the life and efficiency of the boiler are increased, not to mention the safety of persons and property in the vicinity. We recently learned of a boiler that had been owned for nineteen years by a saw mill operator without ever having been inspected, and of course, he was a much surprised man when one day the boiler blew parts of itself into the country. Incidentally, that man is now carrying insurance and having regular inspections.

A boiler owner can, with very little trouble, keep his boiler in condition by blowing it down and washing it out every two or three months. Mud and scale will accumulate on the crown sheet and in the water space around the fire box, which accumulation will cause overheating of the sheets and bulges will appear

between the stay bolts. In some instances the sheets have been burned nearly through, necessitating expensive repairs. The appliances for indicating the steam pressure and the water level in the boiler should be watched and cared for; the safety valve should be kept in proper working order. Under no circumstances should the safety valve be weighted down or set to blow off at a greater pressure than is allowed by the inspector. When repairs are necessary, get a competent boiler maker to make them. You would take a watch to a watchmaker, not do it yourself; why, then, trust a steam boiler, with the potential hazard of dynamite, to anyone who is not skilled in boiler work?

**Should Have Inspection**  
For his own protection, the owner of agricultural boilers, even though the law does not cover such boilers, should have an inspection made regularly by some competent inspector. A boiler in itself is just as hazardous on a farm as on the road or driving a saw mill. Inspections are not expensive, but boilers are. A defect found in its beginning is not always serious and can be repaired at small cost; the longer it is allowed to go, the more the expense of repair and the greater the hazard.

To come back to the law again, the same law as the one covering boilers, it states that all belts and pulleys, gears and other machinery, including circular and band saws, shall be guarded. The purpose of this legislation is readily apparent. Every day in Pennsylvania an average of about six men are killed and nearly six hundred men injured in our industries. Saw mills are included in these figures. As an employer of labor the mill owner is required to carry compensation insurance for his men, and the cost of this insurance is figured upon a base rate for the particular industry and a charge based on the condition of the individual mill. Hence, a mill which is not guarded pays a higher rate for compensation insurance than a mill which has taken steps to safeguard its employees. Thus it will be seen that aside from the humanitarian standpoint, operating a safe mill brings its reward in the form of lower compensation costs. There are certain charges made for unguarded machinery in addition to the regular premium; for example, in addition to the base rate a charge of \$15.00 is made for each unguarded circular rip saw or resaw.

The circular saw guard is usually a hood over the top of the saw with a splitter back of the saw. The wheels of band saws should be entirely enclosed, which can be done with a substantial wire mesh screen. Circular saw mills should have safety guides, and screens placed to protect the sawyer from flying chips. The driving belt from the engine to the mill, and pulleys, should be enclosed as well. The men should be warned, and this is an important point, to avoid unsafe practices such as riding the log, throwing materials where another person might stumble over them, careless piling of the lumber, carelessness in handling materials and tools. If a man gets hurt at your mill, it means loss to you in reduced production until he can be replaced, in addition to your compensation cost.

**Preparing Regulations**  
The Department of Labor and Industry is now preparing regulations on logging and sawmill operations which are intended to assist the mill owner to meet the law's requirements. The law is general, the regulations go into detail and tell how to do what the law states must be done. These regulations will probably be available for distribution the middle of the coming summer and can be obtained by request.

I do not suppose that anyone realizes the number of perfectly reputable employers and mill owners who are law breakers—unconscious law breakers, to be sure—but the fact remains that every owner of an unguarded machine or belt is in that class. The Department, however, prefers not to so regard them until an opportunity has been given, by our inspection, to fulfill the law's requirements. We want rather to have the employer and mill owner to make his mill safe because he sees the benefit to his men and their families, and to himself through lowered production costs. To carry this out the mill owner must realize that he cannot consistently demand safe practices from his men until he has set an example by giving them as safe a place to work as lies within his power to do. Complete understanding and cooperation between the mill owner, his foremen and the men is essential. In some industries, casualty costs have been cut fifty per cent by such means. When an organization like the United States Steel Corporation insists that it pays there can be no doubt that it is so.

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