

Health and Safety Report

Apr 2021

Broomsticks, Push Poles, and Ad Hoc Tools

Our JHSC Workplace Inspections since 2019 have been highlighting the presence of ad hoc tools such as broomsticks, push poles etc. in all departments throughout the plant. These items have been a part of our industrial culture since the beginning of time and have been used as a method to keep the place running. After May 1, 2021, anything used other than a safety finger with power on will be a hazardous energy control violation subject to discipline unless the hazardous energy is controlled. For example, you can still use a broomstick through the fence to push a head or block on a conveyor, but you must have the hazardous energy controlled, **perhaps by locking out the conveyor. If you are unsure, ask your G/L.**

The only device approved for use through guarding with the power on and machine motion present is a 1/2" diameter wooden or acrylic finger that may be up to any length so long as it does not pose additional hazards. You may find place holders for them located right on the machines boldly asking us to "Use this finger, save your own". These are approved for use because they have design limitations that are meant for our protection. They will break if excessive force is applied to them, limiting the force transferred to the worker holding them, preventing an injury. Broomsticks, push poles or ad-hoc tools may only be used if hazardous energy is controlled through lock-out, through an ASA approved task with corresponding TIS, or through a light curtain with a task specific TIS. Sticking an unapproved device through the guarding with the power on is the same as breaking the plane of a guard with your finger or a body part. You will be in violation of the hazardous energy control safety policies, which could lead to **disciplinary action and time off.**

Because we are humans, it is in our nature to want to do a good job and be productive, while simultaneously taking the path of least resistance. We may find a part of the machining or assembly process has faulted out because it's become jammed, or a part is stuck idling on the conveyor, or it's not making a prox switch. The daily resistance we may encounter waiting for someone to come and properly repair and maintain our equipment has led to the common practice developed and accepted over the years of sticking something through the guard to help the part along. When we experience the design limitations of a safety finger, our nature is to overcome those limitations in creative ways to fix the problem so we may continue being productive. If the safety finger is too short get something longer; if it's too flimsy get something stronger and as time passes by the lines have become blurred and the industrial culture in our plant has replaced safety fingers on many operations with ad-hoc tools such as broomsticks, push poles etc. currently exceeding some 500 plantwide. We clear the fault and carry on, satisfying our desire to be productive while encountering the least resistance. However, by us assuming this risk and because there is no down time, we are absolving the company of its legally required duty to maintain its equipment so that it operates as its designed.

It is no longer acceptable to allow the company to rely on our use of ad hoc tools without controlling hazardous energy to push parts out the door. If you encounter an area of your machining or assembly process that frequently faults and requires your help to push the part along with an ad hoc tool, bring it to your G/Ls or T/Ls attention so they can notify Maintenance to repair the condition that's blocking production.

Alternate H&S Rep Mike Pagano has chosen an employment opportunity outside of General Motors. I thank and welcome Richard Piper from HFV6 Block Machining, for replacing Mike and assuming the role of Alternate H&S Rep and worker member of the Joint Health and Safety Committee for the balance of the term.

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