

Machine Guarding — The 6 Essentials

OSHA 29 CFR 1910.212 sets the general requirements for guarding all machines. Inadequate guarding is consistently in the OSHA Top 10 most-cited violations. Use these six essentials to keep every machine — from band saws to power presses — in compliance.

01

Guard the point of operation

Every machine with an exposed point of operation that could injure the operator must have a guard. The guard must keep the operator's hands and body out of the danger zone during operation. No guard is a citable violation, period.

§1910.212(a)(1)(i), (a)(3)(ii)

02

Guard ingoing nip points

Rolls, gears, belts, pulleys, sprockets, and chains create ingoing nip points that can pull in fingers, hands, hair, or clothing in milliseconds. Enclose or barrier-guard every nip point that is within reach of operators or passersby.

§1910.212(a)(1)(iii)

03

Guard rotating parts

Shafts, couplings, collars, keys, set screws, and spindles that rotate must be guarded. Even smooth rotating shafts can catch loose clothing, gloves, or jewelry. Use fixed enclosures or sleeves — not warnings — to control the hazard.

§1910.212(a)(1)(iii)

04

Contain flying chips & sparks

Guards must protect operators AND nearby workers from flying chips, sparks, abrasive particles, and broken tool fragments. Use shields, screens, deflectors, or full enclosures plus required PPE (safety glasses with side shields, face shield).

§1910.212(a)(1)(iv)

05

Anchor fixed machinery

Machines designed for a fixed location — lathes, drill presses, grinders, mills — must be securely anchored to prevent walking, tipping, or movement during operation. Follow the manufacturer's installation specs.

§1910.212(b)

06

Fan blades & rotating drums

Fan blades less than 7 ft above floor or working level must be guarded with openings no larger than 1/2 inch. Rotating barrels, containers, and drums must have an enclosure that interlocks with the drive so it cannot operate unless closed.

§1910.212(a)(4), (a)(5)

Need a machine-guarding assessment, LOTO program review, or operator medical-surveillance support?

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