

Hazard Alert - Push Poles

The operation and use of push poles to assist with the movement of materials and equipment can pose a major hazard to workers.

If not properly selected, inspected, maintained, and used correctly, push poles can cause significant harm to workers, machinery, equipment and property.

Incident Summary

During a new bridge construction project, two workers were struck when a wooden structure, being used as a push pole to assist with the launching of a steel bridge girder, slipped and swung uncontrollably. The wooden structure was suspended by a large crane while being pushed by an excavator to place the bridge girder into its specified location. Neither of the two workers were seriously injured because of the incident; however, there was a high potential of serious injury or death.

Contributing Factors

As the steel bridge girder was being pushed to its specified location by an excavator, the excavator bucket reached its maximum travel distance. It was decided that a push pole would be used to extend the reach of the excavator to complete the final push of the bridge girder. The push pole selected was comprised of wooden beams which subsequently failed causing the girder to swing uncontrollably. There was no hazard assessment conducted and a safe work procedure was not developed for the task being completed. It was also determined that on previous bridge launch operations a steel beam had been used as a push pole, which was secured to the bridge girder and to the excavator bucket to prevent slippage.

Recommended Precautions

- Push poles, like all tools, must be capable of safely performing the functions for which it is used. A professional engineer shall approve the selection and use of a push pole.
- Workers and operators shall not use push poles to assist with the movement of materials or equipment until appropriate hazard assessments are conducted and safe work procedures are developed and implemented.
- A worker and/or operator must be appropriately trained by a qualified person in the safe operation and use of push poles.
- A worker shall not enter, or remain in, a place where there is a demonstrated danger of entrapment, pinning or being struck by tools or equipment unless a safe access is provided or measures are put in place to control the hazard.

gov.nl.ca/dgsnl/ohs

General inquiries: 1.800.563.5471

Serious accident line (24 hours): 709.729.4444

