

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: OSHA's Lockout/Tagout Standard – Lost and Found

[Reference 1910.147(e)(3)]

You walk out into the shop, flip on the power switch to your machine, and nothing happens. Then you go over to the machine's energy control device and find that it is still locked out by an authorized person who had been performing maintenance on the machine earlier that day. When you look around, no one is there. But what appears to be the key to the lock is lying on a work bench beneath the lock. You ask around and no one knows where the authorized person is who locked out the machine; in fact, several people tell you they think that he left the building and is gone home for the day. It's tempting to just remove the lock . . . So what should you do?

Situations like this can be handled several different ways. But there is only ONE right way – and it does NOT involve you using the key to remove the lock yourself. Removing that lock could lead to an accident that causes the person who applied it to be injured, or even worse! How? Perhaps they have not actually left the facility, and return a little later to start back to work after you have re-energized the machine? Or suppose they did leave for the night, but then come back the next morning and start back to work believing the piece of machinery is still locked out? Either scenario, however remote the chances, could turn out to have tragic results.

Our organizational procedure to address this situation is simple; Do not remove the lock. Instead, notify your supervisor or safety manager of the situation, and turn the key over to them. OSHA's Lockout/Tagout standard then requires us to make every effort to locate the authorized employee who applied the lock and verify if they are or are not at the facility. If they are not here, we will either ask them to return at that time to remove their own lock, or notify them that we will remove their lock after assuring they know they are no longer protected on that piece of equipment when they return to resume work at the facility.

This same general procedure applies not only to those instances where you might find an authorized person's key laying around. It also applies when an authorized person inadvertently leaves their lock on an energy control device and then departs the facility with the key in their pocket. We must follow the same procedure to locate and notify the authorized person before using bolt cutters or a similar tool to remove their lock. And if you are an authorized person and discover you have lost your key to your lockout device? Immediately report this to your supervisor or safety manager so we can remove and destroy that lock and replace it with another.

Does anybody have a question or comment about these general requirements to be followed when we find, or lose, the key to an energy control device, or discover the person with the key is gone? Please be sure to sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending this training session.

