

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: OSHA's Lockout/Tagout Standard – Energy Isolation Devices

[Reference 1910.147]

The OSHA Lockout/Tagout standard requires authorized workers to apply their locks to an “Energy Isolation Device” prior to starting work so as to protect them from the equipment or machinery being unknowingly started. However, some people have a misunderstanding of exactly what is - or is not - an energy isolation device.

According to the definition section in the OSHA lockout/tagout standard, an energy isolation device is *“a mechanical device that physically prevents the transmission or release of energy. . . ”*. The OSHA definition goes on to explain that energy isolation devices include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A manually operated electrical circuit breaker;
- A disconnect switch;
- A manually operated switch by which the conductors of a circuit can be disconnected from all ungrounded supply conductors, and, in addition, no pole can be operated independently;
- A line valve;
- A block; and,
- Any similar device used to block or isolate energy.

The definition also tells us that energy isolation devices are NOT the following:

- Push buttons,
- Selector switches; and,
- Other control circuit type devices are not energy isolating devices.

As an example, a regular push-button or toggle switch for a piece of equipment or machinery is NOT an energy isolation device. That is because it only isolates one, and not all, of the conductors providing power to the equipment or machine. Therefore, we would instead be required to isolate the power at a breaker panel or other acceptable energy isolation device to comply.

So if you are an “authorized” employee, take care to identify all energy isolation devices associated with the equipment or machinery you are working on. This information is generally available on our machine-specific written lockout/tagout procedure forms. And if you are an “affected” or “other” employee, NEVER try to activate an energy isolation that has a lock or tag on it, nor should you ever remove someone else’s lock or tag, as that could result in a tragedy.

Does anybody have a question or comment about these, or other, energy isolation devices as defined by OSHA’s Lockout/Tagout standard? Please be sure to sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending this training session.