

## N E W S   R E L E A S E

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### **Cal/OSHA Cites Ceramic Material and Supply Company \$250,000 for Willful Failure to Guard Machinery in Fatal Accident**

**Santa Ana**—Cal/OSHA has issued more than \$250,000 in citations to Aardvark Clay & Supplies, Inc. for its willful failure to properly guard equipment after an employee was fatally entangled in a clay manufacturing machine called a pug mill. Safety guards had been removed from the industrial mixer and the worker had not received training on the machine before the accident.

“Pug mills have rotating blades that can cause amputations and fatally injure employees,” said Cal/OSHA Chief Juliann Sum. “Employers must ensure all machinery and its parts are properly guarded, and employees are effectively trained to prevent tragic accidents like this.”

The Santa Ana company uses industrial pug mills to manufacture and mix clay. On September 20, 2018, an employee became caught in the unguarded mixing blades of the machine when he tried to identify why the clay stopped traveling through the extruder.

Cal/OSHA’s investigation found that all four of the shop’s pug mills had unguarded openings exposing employees to the moving parts. Safety regulations require mixers to have a cover to prevent employees’ hands from entering the machine during operation.

Aardvark Clay & Supplies also failed to effectively train workers on the hazards involved with operating the machinery and did not identify or correct the hazards. Although the manufacturer had provided safety guards for the machinery, the employer removed the guards. At one point, fabricated guards were added to the machines but were later removed when the employer believed they interfered with the rate of production.

Cal/OSHA cited the company \$250,160 in proposed penalties for five violations, classifying one as willful-serious accident-related, one willful-serious, two serious and one general. The willful-serious violations were cited for the employer’s failure to guard machine openings and points of operation. The serious violations identify hazards from the unguarded cutting portion of the clay machine and failure of the employer’s safety

program to identify unsafe conditions, implement corrective procedures and effectively train employees on work-related hazards.

From 2013 to 2017, contact with objects or equipment was among the [leading causes](#) of fatal occupational injuries in California. To avoid accidents and fatalities, employers can get free assistance from Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services to ensure machines are properly guarded.

A citation is classified as serious when there is a realistic possibility that death or serious harm could result from the actual hazard created by the violation, and violations are classified as accident-related when the injury, illness or fatality is caused by the violation. A willful violation is cited when the employer is aware of the law and violates it nevertheless, or when the employer is aware of the hazardous condition and takes no reasonable steps to address it.

Cal/OSHA helps protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace in California. [Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers to improve their health and safety programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734). The California Workers' Information line at 866-924-9757 provides recorded information in English and Spanish on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

Members of the press may contact Peter Melton or Frank Polizzi at (510) 286-1161, and are encouraged to [subscribe to get email alerts](#) on DIR's press releases or other departmental updates.

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