



Safety

How Master Lock Makes Workplaces Safer Without Sacrificing Productivity

James Langford | Jul 27, 2023

Lockout/tagout policies are vital to both employee safety and regulatory compliance, but they come with risks of their own.

Without an organizing strategy, policies and procedures can easily cause confusion about the operational status of equipment, slowing down production and hindering competitiveness.

That's an outcome manufacturers and machinists are eager to avoid—especially in a market where they're already grappling with a dwindling workforce, disruptions in supply chains, high inflation and rising interest rates.

Master Lock has the tools and expertise to help them do just that.

The leading lockout/tagout equipment supplier is prioritizing consultations with customers on crafting comprehensive safety systems that marry tool choices with policy.

All too often, companies focus most of their attention on optimizing lockout policies and procedures while letting the equipment needed to carry it out languish as an afterthought.

"Important questions to consider in setting up a lockout system include what is the task, what is the equipment being locked out, who is doing the lockout, and what type of lockout it is."

Bill Belongea
Master Lock

Making sure managers leverage both, Master Lock says, helps to clarify when and why a machine was locked to prevent accidental startup or energy discharge and to make clear who has the authority to unlock and restart it—helping operations to run smoothly as well as safely.

"There's a method to selecting types of locks, colors and quantities," says Bill Belongea, Master Lock's senior safety services program manager for applied safety solutions and a veteran site safety manager.

"Important questions to consider in setting up a lockout system include what is the task, what is the

equipment being locked out, who is doing the lockout, and what type of lockout it is—group, contractor or operator, for instance,” he adds.

Without a careful strategy to implement their lockout policies, businesses may find themselves with a haphazard assortment of lockout equipment that inconsistently signals its function to existing employees and is tough to explain to new ones, the company warns.



Photo courtesy of Master Lock

That makes compliance with OSHA’s safety lockout regulation, *Standard 1910.147*, even tougher.

Established in 1989, the rule mandates that before employees work on any machine where unexpected startup or energy release might cause injury, the equipment must be isolated from its power source and “rendered inoperative.”

It also spells out equipment requirements designed to help employers set up adequate systems, including a specification that padlocks used to secure equipment be standardized, identifiable and exclusive to safety operations.

Visual cues provided by the lockout equipment are a critical aspect of safety lockouts, Master Lock says. The presence of a designated padlock signals to workers that a lockout has taken place, maintenance work is underway and the lock is intended to keep everyone in the area safe.

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Unique types, colors and markings of padlocks help to support both standardization and identification, the company adds. Each color can segment maintenance operations—by department or facility, for example—supplying information to employees about what kind of work is being done and by whom.

When determining where and how to use different types of locks and equipment, Master Lock

recommends that safety managers also consider how the system can contribute to operational efficiency.

If, for example, blue padlocks are assigned to electricians, they should be located at strategic areas throughout a facility where there's a likelihood of electrical lockouts or on the group lock boxes assigned to the job, Master Lock says.

"While operating a safe and compliant work environment is the top priority, it's also important to understand that compliance and efficiency are not necessarily mutually exclusive concepts," the company says. "Our businesses exist within competitive environments, and maximizing machine uptime is part of the equation."

According to Master Lock, other equipment considerations that may influence efficiency include:

Key Configuration

Two commonly implemented key configurations are "keyed-different" and "keyed-alike." Here's what you need to know about each:

- **Keyed-Different:** A lock that has its own unique key. If an employee usually applies a single lock, a keyed-different lock is recommended.
- **Keyed-Alike:** A set of keyed-alike locks may all be opened with a shared key in the possession of a single authorized person. The more locks that are applied, the more important it is to use a keyed-alike system. This type of padlock is commonly used in a group lockout.

Key Management

Lockout security can be compromised when other keys in the facility are able to open an authorized employee's padlock so master keys and duplicates should be carefully managed. It's important for safety professionals to work closely with padlock suppliers to ensure that key codes used with new locks aren't also assigned to equipment already in use.

Key Retaining Functionality

Padlocks may be either key retaining or non-key retaining, and choosing the best option for the job can improve productivity.

- **Key retaining:** With this lock, the shackle can't be opened unless the key is in the lock and turned to the unlocked position. This is a benefit if locks are being used for personal lockouts and the number of locks in use at any given time is fairly small.
- **Non-key retaining:** In group lockouts, where locks are used in large quantities, having to manually open and close the lock at each isolation point would be cumbersome and slow the installation process. Here, non-key retaining locks are often preferable.

Using Lockout Equipment

If an employee authorized to perform a lockout must cover a large physical area and the number of locks typically needed is minimal, assigning those locks to that worker makes sense.

For equipment that's locked out frequently for changeovers or is large enough to require multiple

padlocks, however, placing the lockout equipment at or near the machine may be a smarter option.

Requiring an employee to cross a facility to get lockout equipment is never a good idea, Master Lock warns. Unproductive movement squanders time, especially with quick-turn activities.

"It should not take four minutes to access lockout equipment in order to complete a 15-minute servicing job," the company explains.

Ultimately, strategic equipment selection on the front end avoids headaches later.

It "improves efficiency from a financial standpoint, as well as a lockout and accountability standpoint," Belongea says. "We try to set that up for customers and streamline the process for them."

How could your workplace improve its lockout/tagout system? Tell us in the comments below.

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