Types of Padlocks – Quick Tips

Padlocks can help improve workplace safety by controlling access to energized areas of the plant, warehouse or factory

Padlocks are an important part of a firm's industrial safety measures—particularly in areas where energized electrical equipment is present and the threat of arc flash accidents is prevalent. Padlocks allow safety supervisors to lock out specific pieces of machinery, equipment or entire areas where repairs or preventive maintenance efforts are taking place.

Selecting the Right Lockout Padlock

For controlling hazardous energies, not just any lock will do. OSHA and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have outlined a number of requirements for these devices. According to OSHA, lockout padlocks must be:

1. Durable—Manufactured with materials that withstand usage environment
2. Substantial—Cannot be removed without considerable force
3. Standardized—Clearly differentiated from other devices by color, shape or size
4. Identifiable—Indicates the authorized employee that applied the device
5. Exclusive for safety—Not to be used for purposes other than controlling energy

NFPA's requirements are similar:

1. A lockout device shall include a lock – either keyed or combination.
2. The lockout device shall include a method of identifying the individual who installed the lockout device. (This is similar to OSHA's #4 requirement above.)
3. A lockout device shall be permitted to be only a lock, if the lock is readily identifiable as a lockout device, in addition to having a means of identifying the person who installed the lock.
4. Lockout devices shall be attached to prevent operation of the disconnecting means without resorting to undue force or the use of tools. (This is similar to OSHA's #2 requirement above.)
5. Where a tag is used in conjunction with a lockout device, the tag shall contain a statement prohibiting unauthorized operation of the disconnecting means or unauthorized removal of the device.
6. Lockout devices shall be suitable for the environment and for the duration of the lockout. (This is similar to OSHA's #1 requirement above.)
7. Whether keyed or combination locks are used, the key or combination shall remain in the possession of the individual installing the lock or the person in charge, when provided by the established procedure.

After these basic requirements are met, there are many other factors to consider, including padlock style, keying system and more.

For information, see our guide to types of padlocks and padlock construction materials.

For more information on OSHA’s control of hazardous energy and lockout/tagout standard see: 29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1910.147

For more information on NFPA requirements see: NFPA 70E-2018 Article 120

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