

BY CASEY CREAMER

## This summer we seem to be having way more trouble than usual with our saws heating in the body. Do you have any ideas?

As my loyal readers will attest, I usually have more ideas than you really want to know about. And some of them occasionally make some sense. In the world of sawmill troubleshooting, one of the things you want to consider first is what changed at the time you started having this trouble. Was there a cold snap that has resulted in having to saw partially frozen logs? Did you go from sawing unfrozen red oak to completely frozen hickory or hard maple? Did you just replace something like the bearings that may have not been realigned properly? Did you just put on a brand-new saw that hadn't been properly checked first? What else changed at the same time?

A number of years ago I got a frantic call from one of my regular customers. He said I had to come out and troubleshoot

his mill right away because suddenly, the mill stopped running properly. It was an emergency according to him. Now keep in mind that there isn't a mill anywhere that I can't find something wrong with. By the same token, just finding something wrong doesn't mean that you found what is causing the problem. Whatever you find has to have some relevance to the symptoms.

Now, remember that in this case, I was walking into a mill that could not produce lumber. That was the general symptom. And because I wanted to match up the chronology, I was looking for the kind of thing that could go out of adjustment or break overnight. You could have a bearing go bad and start to have the resultant heat travel to the saw. That could have happened recently. Or

maybe the sharpener got dropped and subsequently went out of adjustment and nobody realized it.

When I started methodically checking the mill, one step at a time, I kept seeing the same theme. Everything I checked looked worn out, broken, or both. It didn't matter what I checked. Even the edger had hourglass-shaped feed rolls. All the better to produce banana-shaped edge boards with. It quickly became obvious to me that everything that was out of whack and/or just plain worn out, had probably been that way for way more than a week or two. In some cases, it could be measured in years instead of weeks. Basically, what I saw was a mill that was very poorly maintained, and all of a sudden they had a problem making good lumber.

Eventually, I was able to find out what change actually coincided with their all-of-a-sudden inability to make useful lumber. It turned out that as a direct result of a quickly tightening hardwood market, they unexpectedly had a load of lumber rejected that they had shipped to the west coast. So now, this mill seemed to be inoperable. That was all it took.

Now let's get back to your situation. What is different about this summer relative to your mill? I see a couple of issues. It seems like so far it has been extra hot and dry this summer where I am. And then there is the issue with the emerald ash borer. That means that many of you might be sawing some dead or nearly dead ash logs with this extra hot and dry weather, and some of your other logs may be a little dryer than usual. As you all know, these sawmills, circular or band, were designed to process fresh green logs. Sawing dry or dead logs can be done, but it is certainly an extra challenge.





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The fuzzier the wood is, the more kerf you need to prevent the log from heating the saw. Of course, if your saw is dished one way or another instead of being flat on the log side, that will cause heating. But assuming you have a 7 x 8 gauge saw with the normal 9/32" bits, you might want to switch to 5/16" bits just to get through this season. As we get into the winter, you should definitely go back to the 9/32" bits, but for now, the 5/16" bits will buy you that extra side clearance that you need to handle the extra fuzziness of what you are sawing this summer. If you are running a 6 x 7 gauge saw with 9/32" bits sawing hardwood, I think you should run 5/16" every summer while you can switch to the 9/32" for winter sawing. And if you happen to be sawing softwoods with a 6 x 7 gauge saw, you should probably run the 5/16" bits year-round.

You should also concentrate on sharpening a little more often because that fuzzy wood really requires a sharper edge to shear those fuzzy strands and get the job done properly. And, don't forget that the right time to sharpen anything is before it's dull.

*Interested to learn more from Casey Creamer? You can watch our video on how Casey hammers circular saws on The Northern Logger YouTube page. Just search for "The Northern Logger" on YouTube and click the video entitled "How to Hammer a Circular Saw with Casey Creamer." Please send future questions about sawmills and their operation to Casey Creamer, saw doctor and president of Seneca Saw Works, Inc., PO Box 681, Burdett, NY 14818, (607) 546-5887. You can also reach out by email: casey@senecasaw.com.*



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