SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY CREAMER

SAW DOCTOR

We're scratching our heads over alternatives to manually setting saw guides--looking for a safer way. OSHA says the guides cannot be set using tools. A few of our clients have older or even antique mills. "Newer" sets have a knob of some type so one doesn't have to get out the wrenches although some we see still require a tool. Still newer guides have a longer handle and universal joint so a person doesn't have to be near the saw to set the guides. However we get remarks that the person doing the setting cannot look down the saw and set such a guide and a second person is not always available to watch the saw as the guides are adjusted. The classic response is "it's the only way to do it." We see the resulting amputations--fewer as we have fewer circle mills but one is too many. I saw a 17 year-old publication from Missouri and it finished the paragraph with "Be Careful."

The specs I've read say 1/32" clearance. Can't it be set when the blade is stopped despite the dish in the saw?

Are there some retrofits that get the person doing the setting away from the saw and in a position to watch the blade? Or is it even necessary to watch the blade; do they have wrong training? When I have clients with remote guide sets who have no problem with setting the pins I can't help think the others are just trying to feed me a line or they just don't know themselves.

You say: "Can't it be set when the blade is stopped despite the dish in the saw?"

Despite what dish in the saw? If the saw is dished, then it clearly needs to come here for me to remove the dish. Saws are not supposed to be dished. That is one of those old myths that somehow continues to live on forever.

Most of my readers will tell you (because they have read it so many times on these pages) a proper saw should be flat on the log side, with an acceptable amount of wobble, and the right amount of tension in the right location. There are still many out there who think the saw is dished when at rest and then magically stands up when up to speed. I have yet to hear a good reason for saws to be dished in either direction at any time except when they are ready to be properly hammered.

You can set the guides while the blade is stopped, but only if you rotate the blade by hand to make sure you have accounted for the normal acceptable amount of wobble in the blade while setting your guides. Of course if there is more wobble than is allowed, it is time to find out whether that wobble comes from the saw or is generated by the mandrel or collars. Then that wobble needs to be corrected.

It is never a good idea to look down the barrel so to speak of any running saw. If you set the guides while it is not running and then something moves when it is up to speed, you should be able to hear that problem, from the sawyer's booth, or near the sawyer's booth. And if by any chance you have lost so much of your hearing by not wearing ear plugs that you don't notice it right away, you will notice a problem very soon as the saw gets hot on the rim and stretches in the area. And if you still don't notice the problem, you can be sure that your lumber grader will be visiting you very soon to show you some examples of miscut lumber.

If you have a remote way to set your guides such as the long rod and U-joint you mentioned, you should be able to hear when the guides start to touch the rim of the saw so that you can then readjust by backing them off slightly from there.

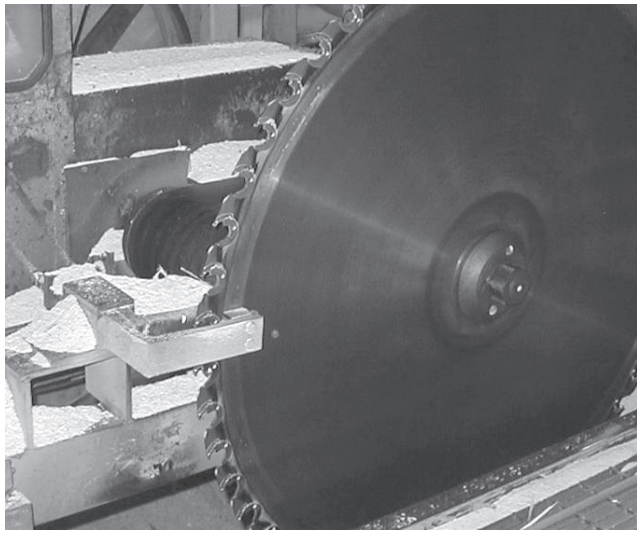
Adjusting the guides on a circular mill is not that big a deal as long as you understand what the guides are there for. They are *not* there to guide the saw straight or in any particular direction. They are only there as a safety measure to help catch the rim of the saw if circumstances allow it to wander too far. These are not really what one would refer to as "guided saws" even though they are saws that indeed have a set of guides.

The maximum amount of clearance between the guides and the saw is directly related to how much the saw wobbles. If your saw is wobbling back and forth a sixteenth of an inch, it would certainly be hard to set your guides with only a

thirty-second of an inch clearance.

My running tolerance for wobble in the saw is plus or minus fifteen thousandths of an inch. Rather than using a specific clearance, I recommend you set the guides as close to the saw as you can get them, without touching the saw at all when it is turned by hand or up to speed. And by the way, if your saws are being hammered as consistently as I think they should be, you actually shouldn't have to change the setting on your guides from one saw to the other unless you have misadjusted your guides to try to compensate for a saw that needs a lot of work to run properly. This sort of compensation may possibly get you by until break time when you can change saws, bit it shouldn't become a habit beyond that limit.

There are more styles of guides out there than there are brands of sawmills. Preferably you want the kind of guides that can be adjusted from inside the sawyer's booth. Even some of those require you to get out there directly in front of the saw to unlock the guides so that you can adjust them. If that is the case, unlock them while the saw is not running. Next, set them while rotating the saw by hand. Then, start up the saw to verify that the setting is still okay. Then shut it down and go out there and lock the guides into position. You should then be able to start up the saw and get to the business at hand, assuming your setting doesn't change by the process of tightening them down.



There are more styles of guides available than there are brands of saws.

Questions about sawmills and their operation should be sent to Forum, The Northern Logger, P.O. Box 69, Old Forge, NY 13420, FAX #315-369-3736.

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