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PRESS RELEASE

Sliding table saw manufacturer Altendorf receives OWL innovation award for “Hand Guard”

New Altendorf development Hand Guard recognised as pioneering worker-safety solution for sliding table saws

Minden-based Altendorf GmbH won over a 12-member jury with its novel safety system for sliding table saws in the category “Industry and Crafts”. This is an important area of development as a workers’ hands are only a few centimetres away from the high-speed rotating saw blade when they guide workpieces during sawing operations. Every day around the world, work-related accidents occur when various materials are cut using sliding table saws. For the most part, commonly known protection systems use technology that relies on the conductivity of skin to detect a hazardous situation and to then pulsate the saw blade to a stop. The problem with this approach: All existing solutions require that contact between the saw blade and hand takes place for the safety system to kick in. In some systems, the machine’s internal components are damaged to prevent continuation of work after the incident.

Early hazard detection is critical

Altendorf’s system relies on the ability to detect the hazard at a very early stage. Various defined situations are optically detected and classified. For this, two cameras collect data which is then processed by a powerful hand-detection programme. When the system identifies a dangerous situation, the hazard is eliminated: Within a quarter of a second the whole saw unit quickly slows down and the saw blade abruptly stops. After the safety assistant has been activated, the machine can immediately go back to work. No damage to the machine or saw blade occurs and the productivity of operations remains intact. Karl-Friedrich Schröder, Head of Development at the Altendorf Group, explains the motivation for the ground-breaking development: “We’ve always been uneasy about the fact that existing systems only ever kick in after the accident has happened. And they cause damage to parts of the machine as well. We wanted the machine to act sooner, first and foremost to prevent accidents – that is, to protect the operator. So we developed a system that gains us valuable time, one that enables us to disable the danger before contact even happens.”

Honoured for innovation power

As jury spokesperson, Thomas Niehoff, General Manager of the Chamber of Commerce of East Westphalia, Bielefeld, outlined the jury's reasons for their award decision during a ceremony held on January 9, 2020, at the BildungsCampus Herford. In his remarks, Niehoff highlighted the innovation power of the machine manufacturer's long-term development work: "In the view of the jury, Altendorf's many years of development work has successfully produced the next level of innovation in table saw safety. This will lead to setting new standards that will improve requirements for worker safety in the woodworking industry and the trades worldwide. At the same time, the company is effectively positioning itself in global competition. With its safety system, Altendorf will significantly boost sales and safeguard jobs."

Stiff competition for the 13th OWL innovation award

The OWL innovation award recognizes companies located in East Westphalia, Germany, for their innovative products, services and processes and is an important business award with strong participation. A total of 85 companies with 91 innovations submitted applications to the 13th award competition. Following an intensive evaluation process, the jury selected five award recipients from the outstanding field of participants. In their selection, the jury primarily focused on the criteria novelty and uniqueness, customer benefit and added value in comparison with similar solutions, market success or market potential and the innovation's impact on the company's future viability.