Be Handy and Safe with Hand and Power Tools

What’s at Stake?

Tuck your thumbs into the palms of your hands and try to tie your shoes, open a bottle, or hold a utensil. How hard was it? Could you even do it? Think about how hard it would be to do these and other everyday tasks if your hands were injured. Hundreds of thousands of hand, wrist and finger injuries occur at work every year.

What’s the Danger?

How do these injuries happen? Many of these occur from faulty or improperly used hand and power tools. Another common cause of tool accidents and injuries is inattention. Taking your eyes off your task for a split second is long enough to leave you with a life-changing hand, wrist or finger injury.

Other causes include: inexperience or overconfidence. Inexperience is an easy to understand danger. You simply may not know how to use the tool properly because you haven’t used a lot, if at all, or you haven’t been properly trained on the safe use of the tool. Overconfidence may be a little trickier to understand. When you’re confident in what you’re doing, or do something for a long time, you tend to get comfortable and forget it can be dangerous. Confidence makes it tempting to take short cuts and work too quickly. You pay less attention to safety practices and are less alert to hazards.

Finally, bypassing, removing, or using tools with missing guards and not wearing PPE or not wearing the right type of PPE are two other common causes for tool injuries.

How to Protect Yourself

1. **Pay Attention** – Focus on the task at hand and if you get interrupted or distracted for any reason, stop immediately and don’t start work again until you can give it your undivided attention.
2. **Make it Personal** – Personal protective equipment is a must for working with tools. Hard hats, gloves, safety glasses, ear plugs and safety shoes are required for most work with tools.
3. **Hold on Tight** – Use clamps or a vise to prevent accidental slipping. Clamps and vises also leave both hands free to operate and control the tool.
4. **Don’t be a Tool** – Use the correct tool and don’t take shortcuts by using a makeshift tool. For example, a screwdriver is not a chisel. Using it like one could cause the screwdriver to snap, fly up and injure someone.
5. **That’s shocking** – Metal tools that contact live electrical wires or energized equipment can shock and kill you. Remember to never use power tools in or around water.
6. **Don’t be a Bad** Influence – Never use tools under the influence of medications, drugs, or alcohol. This includes prescription and over the counter medicines. Being under the influence can make you less alert and slower to react. This puts you and your co-workers in danger.
7. **Don’t Forget** – Finally, always inspect your tools before each use. Keep your tools clean, sharp and well maintained, and store them properly for maximum safe and effective use.

Final Word

Your hands are two of the most useful tools you have. Follow safe work practices and wear proper PPE to protect them and keep them working for you.