Hand Safety and Injury Prevention Meeting Kit

Hand Safety and Injury Prevention Safety Talk

We use our hands for virtually every task we do at work. Keeping our hands and fingers out of harm's way at work is critical. A serious injury to an individual's hands or fingers results in a huge negative impact on their ability to work and overall quality of life. While gloves are the most common form of PPE found in the workplace, hand injuries are still the second leading type of injury on the job.

The most common cause of hand injuries in the workplace today is human error. That's right… not lack of personal protective hand coverage, not faulty machines, not environmental issues. Your own personal mistakes.

Even the most skilled and experienced workers are susceptible to hand-related work injuries. Human error doesn't mean we can't handle the job, but it does mean we have a tendency to grow complacent and get distracted while working. Complacency and distraction are dangerous habits that lead to numerous work-related injuries each year.

TYPE OF HAND INJURY PREVENTION SHOULD YOU FOCUS ON

The most common hand injuries are lacerations and punctures. These are often hand tool injuries caused by cutting tools.

Other common hand and finger injuries to watch for include:

- Smashes, pinches, crushes
- Overuse

- Avulsions and detachments
- Abrasions and burns
- Impact from trips and falls

PROTECTION

There is a myriad of ways to protect hands in the workplace.

- **Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Donning personal protective equipment (PPE) is a great a way to stay safe at work. To protect working hands, wearing proper gloves is a necessity.

- Heat Resistant: These gloves provide protection against burns and flammable surfaces.
- Cut Resistant: These are commonly used when working with knives. They prevent punctures and cuts to the hands.
- Non-Conductive: Thicker non-conductive gloves are worn by electricians to protect themselves against low-voltage electricity.
- Chemical Gloves: These gloves provide much-needed protection against solvents, acids, oils, and caustic materials. Neoprene, nitrile, latex, and vinyl are all examples of materials that offer chemical protection.

- **Implement Engineering Controls**

Engineering controls are another way of ensuring safety in high-risk work environments. Oftentimes, physical safety guards are put into place. These are built into machines with the objective of protecting a worker’s hands from pinch points, rotating parts, and sharp objects. In addition, man-made ergonomic engineering controls are designed to put less strain on wrists, fingers, and hands.

Moreover, engineering controls are important when it comes to hand safety in the workplace. Sensors, light beams, and switches are perfect for ensuring that a worker’s hands aren’t in close proximity to dangerous equipment.

- **Utilize Administrative Controls**

Administrative controls come in handy when it’s impossible to safely implement engineering controls. It’s vital that you introduce proper hand injury prevention training to your team. Some examples of administrative controls include:

- Safety training
- Warning signs
- Lock and tag rules
- Product substitution
- Designing with ergonomic principles

- **Solid Safety Training**

Make sure employees are properly and thoroughly trained when it comes to protecting their hands is crucial. In addition, having hand and finger injury prevention campaign materials readily available for your workers is a must.

SAFE WORK PRACTICES

- Use tools to remove your hands from the line of fire when doing a work task that could result in injury to your hands or fingers. Using Hand Safety Toolbox Talktools such as push sticks when using a table saw is an example that removes your hands from the line of fire.
- Avoid using fixed open blade knives. There are safety knives that limit the length of the blade exposed. They also have a safety feature that retracts the blade when pressure is let off the handle or switch that controls the blade.
- Never put your hand in an area where you cannot see it.
- Always wear the proper gloves for whatever work task you are doing. Understand the limitations of your gloves and what work tasks they are appropriate for.
- Never work on an energized piece of equipment. Lock and tag out the equipment to ensure there will not be unintentional start up while you are working on the equipment.

FINAL WORD

Next time you are doing a simple task at home such as setting the table for dinner, getting ready in the morning, or cleaning- try doing the task with one or two less fingers. It sounds like a silly exercise, but this can help put into perspective how hard it would be to complete tasks without some of our fingers. It is easy to take for granted our health and abilities when we have had them for so long.