

SAFETY MEETING TOPIC: Hand Tool Safety

Hammers, wrenches, chisels, pliers, screwdrivers, and other hand tools are often underrated as sources of potential danger. Hand tools may look harmless, but they are the cause of many injuries. In fact, an estimated 8 percent of all workplace compensable injuries are caused by incidents associated with hand tools. These injuries can be serious, including loss of fingers or eyesight.

Hand tools can cause many types of injuries:

1. Cuts, abrasions, amputations, and punctures. If hand tools are designed to cut or move metal and wood, remember what a single slip can do to fragile human flesh.
2. Repetitive motion injuries. Using the same tool in the same way all day long, day after day, can stress human muscles and ligaments. Carpal tunnel syndrome (inflammation of the nerve sheath in the wrist) and injuries to muscles, joints and ligaments are increasingly common if the wrong tool is used, or the right tool is used improperly. Injury from continuous vibration can also cause numbness or poor circulation in hands and arms.
3. Eye injuries. Flying chips of wood or metal are a common hazard, often causing needless and permanent blindness.
4. Broken bones and bruises. Tools can slip, fall from heights, or even be thrown by careless employees, causing severe injuries. A hammer that falls from a ladder is a lethal weapon.

To avoid such injuries, remember the following safety procedures:

1. Use the right tool for the job. Don't use your wrench as a hammer. Don't use a screwdriver as a chisel, etc. Go back to the tool house and get the right tool in the right size for the job.
2. Don't use broken or damaged tools, dull cutting tools, or screwdrivers with worn tips. Impact tools, such as drift pins, wedges, form stakes, and chisels shall be kept free of mushroomed heads. The wooden handles of tools shall be kept free of splinters or cracks and shall be kept tight inside the tool.
3. Cut in a direction away from your body.
4. Make sure your grip and footing are secure when using large tools.
5. Carry tools securely in a tool belt or box. Don't carry tools up ladders. Use a hoist or rope.
6. Keep close track of tools when working at heights. A falling tool can kill a co-worker.
7. Pass a tool to another person by the handle; never toss it to them.
8. Use the right personal protective equipment (PPE) for the job. Follow company instructions for selecting and using safety eyewear, steel toed shoes, gloves, hard hats, etc.
9. Never carry sharp or pointed tools such as a screwdriver in your pocket.
10. Select ergonomic tools for your work task when movements are repetitive and forceful.
11. Be on the lookout for signs of repetitive stress. Early detection might prevent a serious injury.
12. Always keep your tools in top condition. A dull blade or blunt point can lead to injury.
13. Store tools properly when you stop work.

By following these precautions, you can help prevent injuries and provide a better workplace for everyone. Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!