



5-minute safety talk

Hands-on Advice to **Protect Your Hands**

A worker picks up a dulled chisel and begins to sharpen the tool on a bench grinder. As he steadies the tool against a work rest, his leather glove catches on the abrasive wheel and pulls his hand into the wheel. Unfortunately, this type of serious hand injury is as common as it is tragic.

Yet nearly 12 percent of all on-the-job injuries involve the hands and fingers, according to the *Injury Facts*® from the National Safety Council. Injuries to the fingers and thumb rank as the third most frequently injured body parts. Hand injuries account for more than 170,000 injuries per year and cost, on average, about \$10,200 each in workers' compensation.

Point out protection

The best way to prevent injuries to the hands is to have equipment engineered with the proper defense mechanisms, such as guards and barriers, that do not allow your hands to come into contact with dangerous hazards. However, these safety devices need to be maintained and checked regularly to ensure they continue to work properly. In addition, you can reduce some ergonomic stressors to the hands by rotating workers between jobs and adjusting their workstations.

Chemical hazards, such as caustic materials, solvents or cutting oils require the use of special personal protective equipment. Unfortunately, many workers realize the effects of hazards after the fact. That's why worker education and training is so important. Not only should companies provide protective gloves to employees, but managers also need to inspect the workplace for potential hazards.

There are a variety of hand hazards in the workplace that need more than a protective glove to keep employees safe. More people are learning about the ergonomic stressors that cause cumulative trauma injuries, leading

to more hand injuries being reported. OSHA has responded to this trend by developing ergonomics guidelines.

If the glove fits...

Personal protective equipment for preventing hand injuries includes gloves, tapes, pads, mitts and barrier creams. There are many types of gloves. The trick is to find the right type of gloves for the job. Here are some guidelines:

- Cotton or canvas construction gloves offer general-duty protection.
- Metal-mesh or cut-resistant gloves allow work with sharp-edged material or knives.
- Leather gloves aid work around rough objects and protect workers from chips and sparks.
- Impervious or chemical-resistant gloves suit work with hazardous chemicals or biohazards.
- Hot-mill or aluminized gloves protect from heat and flame.
- Padded or shock-absorbing gloves reduce the effect of vibration.

Workers must frequently inspect their gloves and keep them clean. If a glove is too cumbersome, finger cots and tapes protect specific areas of the fingers and hands for delicate and precise work.

Rub it in

Gloves are not always the right choice for hand protection. For instance, the worker with the chisel found out that gloves and moving machinery or equipment make an unsafe combination. If you work with chemicals, you may not feel that gloves provide sufficient protection. Barrier creams and lotions worn under gloves can provide extra protection. But they are not substitutes for gloves; they only provide minimal protection. Water-repellant

creams offer limited protection against certain acids. Solvent-repellant creams can help when employees work with solvents, oils and other organic chemicals.

Clean up for safety

Poor housekeeping often is overlooked as a cause of hand injuries. Slips and falls often lead to hand injuries because people instinctively use their hands to break a fall. Further, workers who slip or trip may fall into moving machinery. It's a good idea to inspect the workplace for hazards on a regular basis to prevent injuries and accidents from occurring.

Poor personal hygiene can cause hand problems such as dermatitis, an inflammation of the skin. Frequent hand washing with an approved soap followed by use of a moisturizer will help protect a worker's hands. Certain types of gloves, such as latex may trigger an allergic reaction. Try another type of glove if the employee experiences burning, irritation or heat rash. Your hands have a complex physical structure that is irreplaceable. Don't take unnecessary chances with them.

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