

# Avoiding Finger, Hand, and Wrist Injuries

## Toolbox Talk

Whether the hands are of a machine operator, lab technician, or office assistant – a worker's hands are one of their most important "tools" used in work. Despite this, over a quarter of a million people suffer serious (and often disabling) hand injuries each year. By recognizing hand hazards, following established safety guidelines, and using protective guards, shields, gloves, and other personal protective equipment, employers and workers can save hands from injury and disability.

### Recognizing Hand Hazards

One of the most serious, yet common, causes of hand injuries is the use of unprotected or faulty machinery or equipment. Failure to use push-sticks, guards, and kill-switches, or follow appropriate lockout/tagout procedures, are among the leading industrial hand hazards. Wearing jewelry, gloves, or loose-fitting clothing around moving parts can also lead to injury. Chemicals, corrosives, and other irritating substances can cause burns and skin inflammation unless appropriate hand protection is used. Temperature extremes and electrical hazards are other common causes of hand injuries. Additionally, constant repetitive motion (as in assembly-line work or painting) can cause undue stress on the wrists and hands unless protective measures are taken.

### Eliminating and Controlling Hand and Wrist Hazards

When planning the work day, employers and workers should use the Job Safety Analysis (JSA) process to identify the hazards in each individual phase of the job task. Hand and finger positioning is the number one cause of hand injuries. Communication and teamwork are two very important areas in determining and eliminating hazards of the job. During the JSA process, ensure that everyone is aware and knowledgeable of all hazards and risks associated with the job at hand. Taking time to identify hazards can eliminate the most potential hazards for hand injuries. Some guidelines for hand safety to protect hands from injury and disability are:

- Be alert to potential hand hazards **before** an accident occurs.
- Use hand tools; do not use your HAND as the TOOL.
- Perform a JSA to identify the associated hand hazards.
- Be alert to possible unguarded pinch points.
- Use push-sticks, guards, shields, and other protective devices when appropriate, and never remove guards.
- Never wear any jewelry (e.g. necklaces, rings, earrings, wristwatches) within an arm's length of rotating or operating machinery, tools, or electrical switch areas.
- Be aware of proper body positioning when working around both stationary and moving equipment.
- When working with chemicals, know your hazards by reading the Safety Data Sheets (SDS).
- Use proper personal protective equipment (PPE) and position your body a safe distance from chemicals as you work with them.
- Do not wear loose clothing (e.g. unbuttoned shirts and sleeves, loose shirttails, ties, unzipped pant legs on coveralls) when working.
- Inspect equipment and machinery before and after tasks to ensure it's in good operating condition.

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- When working around machinery, utilize proper guarding around moving equipment, and always replace guards after any maintenance work is completed.
- When general maintenance or repair is needed, always use proper lockout/tagout procedures specified for your work area and ensure that all affected workers are adequately informed.
- Always wear the proper hand PPE associated with the job task; gloves should fit properly and be rated for the specific task.
- Use brushes to wipe away debris.
- Select tools designed to keep wrists straight to help avoid repetitive motion/overuse problems.

### **Choosing the Right Glove**

There are various ways in which fingers and hands may be injured, but the use of personal protective equipment (such as the right kind of gloves) can provide protection against many hazards.

To give adequate protection, gloves should:

- Be appropriate for the job;
- Fit properly; and
- Be comfortable.

Choosing the right size glove will prevent the glove itself from becoming a hazard. When gloves become worn, torn, or contaminated, they should be disposed of and replaced.

Remember to be alert, follow procedures, and “Never put your hand in a place that you cannot see!”

