

Safety Bulletin



Our Hands at Work

We know that hand injuries are preventable. By identifying hazards and developing safety measures, you can prevent your hands from injury.

Workplace Hazards and Injury Prevention

A hazard is energy that can cause harm. Injuries can be immediate or may happen over time. In the workplace, your hands are subject to many types of hazards.

Mechanical Hazards: From tools, equipment, machines, structures and vehicles there are numerous mechanical hazards that are presented. To prevent mechanical hazards from turning into an injury be sure to:

- Work at your own pace. The frequency of hand injuries is proportional to how quickly you work
- Stay alert! Always watch what your hands are doing
- Use a push steady to feed power tools, as appropriate
- Know how to handle the tools and equipment you work with. Do not take shortcuts.
- Ask if you are unsure!

Heat and Cold Hazards: Burns to hands can be caused by exhaust pipes, sparks, steam, hot pipes, hot liquids, welding and molten metals. Even extreme cold can cause burns. Your hands and fingers turn numb at -15°C, which can increase the risk of accidents. To control heat and cold hazards:

- Use gloves appropriate for the job and temperature
- Insulate tool handles
- Let hot surfaces cool before working on them
- Before hands become too cold, take time to warm them up

Chemical Hazards: Chemical substances may irritate the skin, causing redness, itching, eczema, inflammation, dryness and serious burns. Some chemical products are doubly dangerous; in addition to being irritants, they are toxic when absorbed by the body through the skin. Degreasers, metals, plant and animal oils, dyes, inks, cleaning solutions and many other chemical products can damage the skin on your hands. Protecting your hands from chemical hazards can look like:

- Keep containers labelled and be sure to always read, understand and follow the manufacturer's directions
- Protect your skin by wearing proper gloves for the substances being handled
- Report any problem with a substance or protective clothing
- Wash your skin well with soap and warm water or use special cleansers, especially after direct contact with a chemical substances before smoking or eating
- Don't wipe your hands on chemically contaminated rags
- Use barrier creams when there is no other way to protect your hands.

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Sprains and Strains: Strains and sprains occur when the muscles and ligaments that hold the joints in place are bruised, pulled or even torn. These injuries often occur when you lift heavy objects or try to break a sudden fall. To prevent sprains and strains of your hands:

- Beware of broken floors and torn or curled rugs or mats. Report these hazards for repair
- Use handrails on stairs
- When moving heavy or bulky things, use a lifting device or ask for help.

Fractures: Fractures occur in what are typically referred to as “hand traps”, such as wheels, pulleys and rollers, or when a hand strikes a hard object.

- Keep your hands away from machines in operation
- Position hands carefully so fingers are out of the line of fire
- Feed rotary or operating machines with a push stick.

Crush Injuries: Crush injuries damage deep tissues and bones. They occur when your hand is caught between two solid parts that strike each other, such as falling objects, doors and drawers.

- Always use the protective devices on machines
- Be sure you can see what you are doing and don't take shortcuts to get the job done faster
- When using bench-mounted machines, make sure they are securely fastened in place.
- Make sure your gloves do not get caught in moving parts
- Do not reach into moving parts on equipment

Abrasions: Abrasions and lacerations occur when skin is rubbed away by friction from belts, sanders, grinders, and rough materials. Not only does broken skin hurt, it also allows for easy absorption of toxic or infectious substances to enter your body.

- Do not remove protective devices from machines
- Wear proper gloves for the job

Cuts: Cuts can occur when you use dull cutting tools, or handle sharp metals and other materials with jagged edges. Prevention tips for cuts include:

- Keep your hands and fingers away from cutting tools
- Pass tools to other workers handle first
- Store tools safely when not in use and replace worn out or broken tools
- Use grips, suction cups, or magnetic pads to help carry metal or glass sheeting
- Wear proper gloves
- Ensure the material you are cutting is secured

Too often we forget just how amazing and vulnerable our hands really are. Routinely working with tools or machinery can sometimes result in careless ness. Stay alert and work safely.

Remember that an injury can happen in a split second and could potentially result in a lifetime of disablement and hardship for yourself and your family.