Hand Tool Hazards

WHAT'S AT STAKE

We all know how important it is to use caution around power tools. But what about tools in general? Can a wrench really be dangerous? The reality is that tools powered by a worker's strength alone cause serious injuries each year.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Used carelessly, a hand tool can cause fractures, bruises, scrapes, punctures, cuts and worse. Workers are at greatest risk when misusing a hand tool or when using a tool that has been poorly maintained.

EXAMPLE
A worker using a hammer and chisel without eye protection found out just how dangerous basic tools can be. The worker was left partially blind after a fragment flew into his eyes. In another instance, a worker not wearing gloves nearly cut off his thumb while using a knife to open a cardboard carton. The lesson to take away is this: Never improvise and always wear your PPE (personal protective equipment).

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Choose the right tool for the job. A wrench isn't a sledge hammer, a knife isn't a can opener and a screwdriver isn't a crowbar.
- Examine your tools regularly to ensure they are clean and defect-free. Throw out or repair any tool with a split handle, worn jaws, dull blades, dull cutting teeth or a mushroomed striking head.
- Use insulated tools when working with or near electricity. But don't rely on the insulation alone; take all other precautions to prevent electrical shock.
- Tools used in potentially flammable or explosive environments should be of the non-sparking type. Do not rely on the non-sparking features alone. Take all other precautions to prevent explosions and fires.
- Wear the required PPE (personal protective equipment) such as safety goggles, gloves and boots.
- Dull blades cause injuries, so keep your tool blades sharp and remember to cut away from your body.
- Carry tools in a tool belt, apron or secure tool box – never in your pockets.
- Never carry tools in your hands when climbing a ladder or scaffold.
- Do not "toss" tools to others because you might injure somebody or possibly damage the tool.

- Look around you to ensure the path is clear before swinging a sledge hammer or similar tool.

FINAL WORD

Treat hand tools with the same respect you do any piece of equipment or machinery. Remember, it is your safety, and the safety of co-workers, that is at stake.