Keep Safety On Hand



Safety Talk

As you know, even a minor hand injury can be painful and inconvenient. You don’t want to find out how life-changing a major hand injury would be.

The worst, of course, would be an amputation – cutting off a hand or fingers. An amputation can be fatal because of the loss of blood, shock, infection or other effects. An amputation can happen in an instant when a hand touches a powered blade or gets trapped in machinery.

The hands can also be subject to cuts, also known as lacerations. When nerves, muscles or tendons are damaged, or when foreign material gets into the cut, these wounds can be serious. A wound can be the start of permanent loss of mobility and strength in the hand. Cutting tools and sharp projecting objects such as nails on pallets commonly cause cuts.

Fractures can take a long time to heal, and in some cases a broken hand is never as good as new. A hand can be fractured when it is hit by a falling object, struck by a tool or slammed in a door.

Punctures occur when a sharp object such as a splinter or a screwdriver enters the skin. These injuries can go right through muscles and connective tissues. Infection is a major problem with puncture wounds. Burns can be caused by contact with hot surfaces or materials, with electricity or with corrosive chemicals. Steam burns are common injuries in jobs ranging from boiler fitting to restaurant service.

If hearing about these possible hand injuries is making you uncomfortable, that’s good. These descriptions are to remind you of the importance of safe work practices and the right personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent injuries.

You must watch continually for dangers in the workplace, including dangers to your hands. One such hazard is the point of operation on machinery and tools. This is where the work is done on the material – the point where it is being cut, punched, drilled, milled, sliced or crushed. As you can imagine, this is also the point where your hands could be cut, punched, drilled, milled, sliced or crushed.

The moving parts that make a machine work are also dangerous places for your hands. Rotating shafts, flywheels and spindles, as well as chains, belts, conveyers and pulleys can mangle hands that get in the way.

The hands are in constant danger when you move materials manually or with lifting

equipment. Your hands can get crushed under heavy objects or smashed between an object and an obstruction such as a doorjamb.

Caution and safe work practices protect your hands. So do gloves, provided you choose the right ones for the particular hazard and use them correctly. Talk to your supervisor to find out whether you need cotton, leather, neoprene, nitrile, latex, insulated or another type for the hazards of your work.