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SAFETY FOCUS: HAND PROTECTION

We use our hands for so many things that we often take them for granted. Because of this, they are the most frequently injured part of the body. Planning ahead, paying more attention to your hands, keeping them out of harm's way and using appropriate personal protective equipment can help prevent most of these injuries.

Hospital emergency room studies confirm that hand and finger lacerations are one of the most common injuries treated. Skilled tradesmen account for about a third of those injuries. Malfunctioning machinery, uncommon work tasks, increased work pace and distractions contributed to injuries. Workers who wear gloves seem to suffer fewer hand injuries.

What are the major sources of hand injuries?

- Trauma resulting from mechanical hazards, such as cuts, abrasions, punctures, broken bones and amputations
- Electricity and heat sources resulting in burns and possible nerve damage
- Chemicals and other irritants leading to chemical burns, abrasions, simple skin irritation and dermatitis

Why do we incur hand injuries?

- Inadequate machine guarding
- Missing machine guarding
- Using the wrong tools
- Using tools incorrectly
- Inadequate training for the task being performed
- Not wearing appropriate hand protection
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Using inappropriate solvents and cleaning agents
- Not following proper ergonomic practices

What are ways to prevent hand injuries?

- Keep machine guards in place.
- Properly use the correct tools.
- Remove hand jewelry.
- Use lockout / tagout procedures to prevent unexpected start-up of equipment.
- Keep tools in good condition.
- Keep your work area clean and free from debris.
- Obtain training on proper tool usage.
- Don't use your hand as a temperature gauge.
- Use barrier creams to prevent skin contact with irritants.

How do gloves protect the hands?

- Cotton gloves can protect against abrasions, cuts, snags and temperature extremes.
- Leather gloves protect against rough surfaces, heat, cuts and sparks.
- Cut-resistant gloves can protect against sharp edges and thermal hazards.
- Chemical-resistant gloves resist penetration and permeation; and can protect against dermatitis, chemical burns and corrosion.

Gloves can provide protection from a variety of concerns, but they must be used with care, and the proper selection for the hazard is critical. In some cases, gloves can contribute to injuries. Understanding the types of gloves, and their appropriate uses, is the key to a good hand-protection program.

Protecting your hands is a constant job. Whether it is un-jamming a machine, loading parts, changing tools, lifting a tray or any other job using your hands, think about the job before you do it and imagine what could happen. Assume it could happen, and take appropriate action to prevent an injury.

Use your head to protect your hands.

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