

Preventing Hand Injuries

Gary Hanson- American Safety and Health Management

Hand Injuries account for 27% of all OSHA Recordable Injuries. These are the ones that require more than first aid level treatment. Over 200,000 wrist, hand and finger injuries involve days away from work each year. A hand injury that is recordable happens every 32 seconds. Add this to the number of hand injuries that take place every day that do not require professional medical treatment.

Hand injuries can be associated with working with or around:

- Machinery or equipment that have exposed points or operation, in running nip points and rotating parts.
 - Incorrect handling of materials
 - Hand and power tools
 - Hazardous chemical
 - Electrical hazards
 - Hot surfaces
 - Continued stress factors

Because we use our hands so frequently, we can take them for granted. Sometimes we underestimate the dangers or potential risk we place our hands in. To avoid hand injuries, it is important to:

- Know the hazards and dangers of each job or operation.
- Be aware of pinch points.
- Be aware of rotating or moving equipment.
- Be aware of chemical exposures.
- Be aware of hot surfaces.
- Keep the off hand out of harms way when using hand and power tools.
- Never remove machine guards.
- Wear protective gloves when handling sharp objects or materials.
- Keep your hands out of harms way when picking up and setting down or moving large objects.
- Exercise your hands and take a rest break if you are required to do prolonged repetitive work with your hands.
- Avoid wearing rings around moving equipment of machines.

The key to hand injury prevention is awareness of the danger we put our hands in. Hand Safety is a personal responsibility. It requires a respect for the hazards and complete commitment on your part. You need to be conscience of where your hands are at all times. Always stay alert, do not be on automatic pilot, disregard safety procedures, avoid distractions and always be aware of where your hands are.

Remember how important your hands are. Without your hands, it would be extremely difficult to do routine simple tasks, such as opening doors, tying your shoes, using a fork, buttoning your shirt, zipping your zipper and other tasks we take for granted every

day. Hand injuries can also be difficult to heal because of the complexity of the hand. It takes a long time to regain normal flexibility, grips, motion and strength.

Take care of your hands:

- Avoid washing your hands with solvents, harsh soaps or abrasives.
- Clean and bandage all cuts and abrasions.
- Wash immediately after handling any chemicals.
- Pay attention to skin rashes, get medical attention if necessary.
- Wear protective gloves where necessary.
- Do a few simple hand exercises before work or between tasks to build flexibility and hand strength to provide rest from stressful repetitive motions.

We have the ability to reduce or eliminate the majority of hand injuries. Do not take it for granted. Pay attention, be alert, do not get in a hurry and never disregard safety procedures.