

TOOLBOX TALK #10

UNDERSTANDING HAND TOOL ERGONOMICS

It's important to exercise good ergonomics throughout the day. If you use hand tools as part of your job, keep the following in mind.

The Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) states that ideally, workers should be able to operate a hand tool with one hand, and that tools should feel "easy" to hold, with the center of gravity aligned with the center of their hand. Additionally, employees should select tools that allow them to keep their wrists straight. (Bend the tool, not the wrist.)

Regarding texture, grip is important. Hand tools should be constructed with non-slip, non-conductive and compressible materials, such as rubber, according to CCOHS. Cover any sharp edges with cushioned tape to reduce the chance of sustaining cutting injuries. When considering the length of a hand tool, workers should pick a tool with a handle at least 5 inches long to help prevent compression to the middle of the palm.

Sometimes using power tools instead of manual ones is the best option. For example, if a job task requires using a lot of forceful, repetitive motions, look into power tools. Just be sure to conduct a risk assessment before making any changes, CCOHS notes, adding that employers should ensure "all aspects of the new tool have been considered (weight, size, etc.) to be sure that one type of hazard has not been exchanged for another."



One power tool related risk to watch out for is called "trigger finger", which occurs when a worker uses his or her finger or thumb too often when operating the trigger. To help prevent this, use power tools with longer triggers that allow two or three fingers to be placed on the trigger.

Another ergonomic power tool hazard is excessive vibration. Purchase power tools designed to vibrate less or that feature anti-vibration materials.