

TOOLBOX TALK #20

GET A HOLD ON HAND SAFETY

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2016 there were 1,118,400 non-fatal occupational hand injuries involving days away from work in private industries in the United States. Hand injuries resulting from cuts and puncture cost the construction industry approximately \$382 million each year, second only to back strain and strain injury, according to the BLS. The National Safety Council offers a guide to estimating costs. For example, the direct cost of a laceration is about \$10,000, stitches about \$2000 plus indirect costs, butterfly about \$300, and a severed tendon about \$70,000.



Protect your hands

According to the BLS, 70% of workers who experienced hand injuries were not wearing gloves. To help prevent workplace injuries, OSHA's hand protection (PPE) standard mandates that employers select and require employees to use appropriate hand protection when employees' hands are exposed to the following hazards:

- Skin absorption of harmful substances
- Severe cuts or lacerations
- Severe abrasions or punctures
- Chemical burns or thermal burns
- Harmful temperature extremes

OSHA recommends that gloves be selected based on the task that will be performed, the chemicals encountered, and the performance and construction characteristics of the glove material. Choosing the right hand tool is also a key part of protection your hands. Tools with handles that fit your hand reduce fatigue, increase productivity and reduce the risk for hand and wrist problems. Having to grip a tool too tightly or bend your wrist awkwardly to use a tool can lead to repetitive strain injuries and reduce your grip strength.

Common hand injuries

- Fractures, crushed injuries and amputations
- Lacerations, cuts, and punctures
- Skin disorders caused by contact with chemicals and burns
- Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) caused by using a forceful grip, awkward hand and wrist positions, and/or excessive hand vibration

A hand injury such as a loss of a finger, a broken bone, nerve damage, MSD or skin disorder, can interfere with a worker's job performance and quality of life, sometimes ending a career. Work-related hand injuries are also costly to the employer, in terms of lost work time and productivity, and higher insurance rates.

Avoid injuries on and off the job

If you work with your hands for most of the day, you might be at increased risk of repetitive stress injuries. Plenty of common activities present additional risks to the hands, including yard work, working on a car or power tool use. Practicing the same hand safety habits you follow on the job will help keep your hands safe at home.