

# Preventing cuts and lacerations

By Rich Gaul

## Before you begin

Assess work operations and review accident reports as well as personal protective equipment available/required to prevent cuts and lacerations. Be prepared to use a question-and-answer format to encourage employee participation in the discussion. Encourage employees to provide examples of potential cut and laceration hazards as well as suggestions for improvements to your organization's safety program.



## Introduction

Each year, millions of workers suffer workplace injuries that could have been prevented. Some of the most common and preventable injuries are cuts and lacerations. Although statistical data differs from study to study, cuts and lacerations often rank as the second or third most frequent workplace injury. Approximately 30 percent of all workplace injuries involve cuts or lacerations, and about 70 percent of those injuries are to the hands or fingers.

Common cut/laceration injuries (use examples relevant to your operations) include:

- Scratches and abrasions;
- Minor cuts requiring first aid;
- Needle sticks;
- Puncture wounds;
- Deep lacerations requiring medical attention, sutures;
- Lacerations involving nerve and/or tendon damage;
- Amputations.

**Note:** Review past incidents/injuries involving cuts and lacerations. Have participants discuss the cause of the injuries and how the worker or the employer could have prevented the injuries from occurring. Review the items on the next page to determine if any of the injuries resulted from not following one or more of the listed items. Also, ask participants to identify other typical hazards/causes.

## Typical hazards/causes of cuts and lacerations

- Improper training
- Lack of established safety procedures
- Employees in a hurry, taking short cuts or not following safety procedures
- Failure to wear cut-resistant gloves or wearing improper gloves for job
- Contact with metal items such as nails, metal stock or burrs
- Hand tools with blades (e.g., knives, box cutters, screwdrivers, chisels)
- Powered machinery with cutting blades, pinch points, chain and sprocket, conveyor belts, rotating parts, motors, presses, lathes
- Handling sharp objects or material such as glass, sheet metal

- Improper tool for the job or tool used improperly (e.g., using a screwdriver as a pry bar)
- Tools in poor condition (e.g., cracked or broken handle, dull blade, mushroomed head or slippery from exposure to oil-based chemicals)
- Missing or improperly adjusted guarding
- Poor housekeeping, clutter, debris
- Poor lighting, reduced visibility

### Prevention strategies

The key to preventing these injuries is keeping body parts away from hazards. Employers should establish work procedures to identify and control exposure to hazards. Ask participants to suggest control measures to minimize the risk for cuts and lacerations. Possible answers include:

- Training employees to use established safety procedures;
- Maintaining proper machine guarding;
- Using lockout/tagout procedures;
- Wearing personal protective equipment;
- Safe tool use;
- Good housekeeping.

One of the most common sources of cuts and lacerations is the use of knives and other cutting tools. Gather examples of utility knives and other cutting tools used at your facility and a copy of safety procedures regarding their use. Review your safety procedures, or use the following suggestions.

### Knife/blade safety

- Wear proper safety gear; eyewear, gloves, sleeves.
- Use the proper tool for the job.
- Inspect tools prior to use.
- Keep work area clear.
- Keep tool under control at all times.
- Keep the item you are cutting secured; don't hold work in hand while cutting.
- Use a sharp blade; a dull blade requires greater force, increasing potential hazards.
- Replace blades when they become dull; use caution when disposing of used blades (e.g., use approved sharps container or wrap the cutting edge with heavy tape).
- Stand in a well-balanced position.

- Pull the blade toward you when cutting on a horizontal surface.
- Make sure the path of the cut is clear, and keep the non-cutting hand out of the path of the cut.
- When cutting thick material, use several passes of the blade and apply more downward pressure with each pass.
- Never use a cutting blade as a screwdriver, pry bar or chisel.
- Don't leave exposed blades unattended; use self-retracting cutting blades.
- When appropriate, use rounded tip cutting blades rather than pointed tip blades.
- Maintain proper storage or use a separate drawer for sharp cutting tools.
- Keep cutting tools in a closed position or covered with a protective sheath.

Gather examples of gloves or other personal protective equipment designed to minimize risk of cuts and lacerations.

### Gloves

Selecting the right glove for the right application can improve worker safety and productivity. Comfort is one of the most important factors when selecting hand protection. If gloves are not comfortable, workers are less likely to wear them. Understanding the different types of gloves and their appropriate uses is important to a good hand-protection program.

### Closing

With thorough analysis and planning, you can develop a prevention plan to help eliminate these types of injuries from your workplace. Thankfully, the number of cuts and lacerations reported decreases each year.

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