

### Before you begin

Gather examples of the various utility knives your workers use. During your discussion, show each type of utility knife used in your operation and explain the tasks it performs. Before distributing or allowing an employee to use any utility knife, make sure they receive training on the proper selection, use, and maintenance.

What you will learn

- How to select the proper utility knife
- How to safely use a utility knife



### Introduction

Many workplace injuries occur from the improper use of a common workplace tool known as the utility knife. Employees use utility knives to cut open boxes, tear away shrink-wrap from packages, cut drywall, and open bags. Workers use them in numerous work environments, including construction, industry, restaurants, and shipping departments. Utility knives can cause common and frequent workplace injuries such as hand lacerations, cuts, and puncture wounds. These injuries are usually due to improper use or the use of the wrong type of utility knife for the job. More than \$300 million is spent each year for hand lacerations alone, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). To prevent injuries, workers must pay close attention when using utility knives.

### Discussion

**Utility knife selection** - Anyone using a utility knife should ensure the knife is appropriate for the job and in good condition. There are several types of utility knives workers can use. Manufacturers consider ergonomics and job specification when designing utility knives. The following details the various types of utility knives workers commonly used on the job.

**Automatic re-loading utility knife** – With this knife, users remove the old, used blade and then retract a slide to provide a new blade stored inside the knife. These knives are often used for box cutting but can be used for many other applications as well.

**Break-away or snap-off utility knife** – This knife offers users a simple way to change blades. The user breaks off the spent blade tip at the next perforation located on the blade. Blades usually come in seven to 13 segments of perforated blades. These knives work well for cutting rigid foam or insulation.

**Fixed-blade knife** –The blades of these knives lock securely into place when used. However, the blade is always exposed. Small fixed-blade knives are used for crafts while larger fixed-blade knives are used for hunting and butchering.

**Retractable knife** –This knife is probably the most widely used throughout all industries. The user of this knife can adjust the length of the blade for usage at any length they need. People use this knife in a variety of ways, from cutting tape on a box to cutting linoleum.

**Self-retracting utility knives** –This knife requires the user to depress a button while cutting. This helps prevent accidents from occurring when a user forgets to retract the blade.

## Safety rules when using utility knives

Keep your body parts out of harm's way, by cutting away from your body. Before making the first cut, visualize the cutting path of the blade. Keep your eyes on the object while cutting, never looking away or becoming distracted.

When cutting an object, place it on a stable surface to prevent it from shifting. When possible, hold the object with another device other than your hand when cutting.

Properly store utility knives when not in use to protect workers from accidental cuts. Users should retract the blade or place the knife in the provided sheath after use.

Keep utility knife blades sharp. Replace or sharpen blades when they become dull to prevent excessive operator force needed to compensate for a dull blade edge.

Wear cut-resistant gloves when using utility knives. Adequate personal protective equipment will prevent an injury from occurring if a blade slips. Safety glasses will prevent a possible cut to the eye if a blade tip breaks.

Choose the right tool for the job. Make sure the design is specific to the materials used. A utility knife should not replace the function of a chisel, awl, scraper, or screwdriver.

## Group activity

Demonstrate the proper blade change procedure for the various types of utility knives in your organization. Reference any policy and procedures your organization has in place. After demonstrating the proper blade change, show employees where they should dispose used blades in your facility.

## Conclusion

Utility knives are available in several shapes and sizes. Selecting the proper knife for the job, following the safe cutting techniques described above, and keeping your mind on the task are key to preventing utility knife injuries.

## Resources

7 Safety Tips When Using a Utility Knife

<https://www.doityourself.com/stry/7-safety-tips-when-using-a-utility-knife>

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: Working Safely with Sharp Blades or Edges

[https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety\\_haz/sharp\\_blades.html](https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/sharp_blades.html)

A Basic Guide for Selecting the Proper Gloves

<https://ohsonline.com/Articles/2007/06/A-Basic-Guide-for-Selecting-the-Proper-Gloves.aspx?Page=1>