

The Utility Knife

By Tonja Rammel

Before you begin

Gather examples of the various utility knives used in your operation. During this session show each type of utility knife used in your operation and explain the tasks that it performs. Before distributing or allowing an employee to use any utility knife, ensure he or she receives training on the proper selection, use and maintenance.

What will you 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. They are located in about every facet of the work environment, including construction, industry, restaurants and shipping departments. Utility knives have contributed to common and frequent workplace injuries such as hand lacerations, cuts and puncture wounds. Injuries typically occur because of improper use or the use of the wrong type of utility knife for the job. More than \$300 million dollars is spent each year for hand lacerations alone, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Workers must pay close attention when using utility knives to prevent injuries.

Discussion

Utility knife selection

Some fundamentals of utility knife safety are that the knife must be appropriate for the job and in good condition. If an individual decides to use a utility knife for a particular task, proper knife selection is instrumental in injury prevention. There are several types of utility knives available for use throughout the industry. Manufacturers take into account ergonomics and job specification when designing utility knives. The listing below details the various types of utility knives commonly used in the workplace.

Automatic re-loading utility knife - With this knife, operators 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 a simplistic way of changing blades. The operator 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 he or she needs. 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 keep a button depressed while cutting. This option helps to prevent accidents from occurring when a user forgets to retract the blade.

Safety rules when using utility knives

Keep your body parts out of the line of fire. 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.

Keep utility knife blades sharp. Replace or sharpen blades when they become dull to eliminate excessive operator force required 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.

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.

References

<http://www.osha.gov/>

<http://www.worksafecenter.com/safety-resources/PDF/tutorial/retail/Utility%20Knife%20Safety.pdf>

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