

Working Safely with Portable Hand Tools

Portable hand tools, either manual, electric, hydraulic, or pneumatic, can be a lethal combination of energy, sharp edges, fast moving parts, and excessive force. Without a doubt, your technicians surely know how to operate their tools in an “expert” fashion. But do they know everything there is to know about using them safely?

These accidents are caused from three primary sources

- Choosing the wrong tool for the job (or using the right tool incorrectly)
- Using a tool without appropriate safeguards
- Applying excessive force on a tool, resulting in loss of grip or even muscle strain

Even if you’ve heard most of these guidelines before, it is important to review them with staff periodically to keep the safety procedures fresh in their minds. So let’s get started...

Do...

- Know the purpose of each tool, and use it only for that purpose
- Inspect tools before each use and replace/repair if damaged
- Use the right sized tool for the job
- Choose quality tools (not just the economy brand). Higher quality tools typically offer better design and limit excessive strain on the body
- Make sure power switch is “Off” before use
- Power off and bleed the powered line before disconnecting a tool from its power source
- Use power tools when excessive force is necessary to loosen/tighten an object
- Use lubricants to loosen tight bolts
- Use double insulated power tools with GFCI connection
- Make sure you’re standing on good, balanced footing when using tools
- Carry tools with sharp edges pointed away from your body
- Keep work area clean and dry
- Use tools in a well-lighted area
- Wear PPE (i.e. safety glasses, disposable masks) when using a power tool, especially for grinding, chipping, sanding
- Use only cutting blades in protective holders with safety lip
- Place discarded blades in a blade container
- Cut away from yourself, never toward your body
- Use spark resistant tools near any flammable substance (liquid, vapor, or gas) (spark resistant tools are usually made of brass, plastic, aluminum, or wood)

Don't...

- Use any tools unless you've been trained
- Test a cutting edge with your fingers
- Put sharp or pointed tools in your pockets
- Clean or repair a tool while power is connected. Always disconnect power from unit!
- Use tools without appropriate safety guards before use
- Wear jewelry or loose clothing when operating power tools
- Use power/pneumatic tools with frayed cords or observable defects
- Stand in wet floor areas when working with tools
- Mix horseplay with tool use

A few final comments: The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) requires that all employers provide appropriate hand protection to all employees when hands are exposed to hazards such as those from skin absorption of harmful substances, severe cuts and/or lacerations, severe abrasions, punctures, chemical burns, thermal burns and harmful temperature extremes (cold and hot). As of February 13, 2008, employers are responsible for supplying all personal protective equipment at no cost or expense to the employee.

For more information on OSHA's requirements for Hand Protection, see the OSHA website at: www.osha.gov. Specific regulations for Hand Protection are 29 CFR 1910.138.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - *The information and suggestions presented by PMA Companies in this risk control bulletin are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related or other laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter the information and suggestions to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.*

