Sharpen Your Tool Safety Sense



WHAT'S AT STAKE It's ironic that tools are vital to maintaining machinery, yet many people drop the ball when it comes to maintaining the hand and power tools that help them perform this maintenance.

WHAT'S THE DANGER
Too often, people believe that using a power tool or hand tool is a no-brainer exercise. Some people are so sure of their ability to operate power tools that they won't even consult the owner's manual before firing up a new piece of equipment. That's simply asking for trouble.

EXAMPLE
The results can be deadly. A worker grabs a hammer and starts pounding away without checking it. The hammer's head flies off, striking another worker in the temple. The worker dies later that day.

A welder is using an angle grinder to prepare surfaces before welding. Unfortunately, the grinder and cutting disk are not compatible and the disk fractures, sending fragments into his chest and abdomen. He does not survive.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

It's vital that you familiarize yourself with a tool's operation, safety features, and precautionary measures before using it. It's equally important to examine the tools themselves to ensure they are safe to use. And check their condition again before putting them away at the end of your shift.

Here are some things to watch out for:

- Are all cords and extension cords in good condition, with no cracks, rips, or frays in their insulation?
- Are all power tools that use cords properly grounded or double-insulated? Has anyone modified plugs or cords?
- Are all power tools stored in a dry area?
- Does the on/off switch work properly?
- Are all bits or blades sharp and free of defects?
- Is the drill bit or blade you intend to use the right one for the material you will be cutting or drilling?
- Are all guards in place and do they retract smoothly to prevent contact with the blade once a cut is made?

If you find any defects, tag the tool and note the defect, so others will not use it. Never return a defective tool to storage untagged. The next person who comes along might not spot the defect and end up seriously injured or worse.

Along with checking power and hand tools and their cords for any surprises, you also need to check your surroundings for hazards that could lead to injury. For example:

- Is the floor clear of tripping/fall hazards and are there any flammables or chemicals nearby that could become ignited by sparks generated by tools?
- Are you wearing appropriate personal protective equipment to help protect yourself against injury? Is there a need for respiratory protection? Are you using the right kind? If in doubt, ask your supervisor.
- Are you wearing loose clothing or jewelry that could become entangled in power tools? Do you have long hair? Is it tied back?

FINAL WORD
Hand and power tools are common items in most workplaces. But they’re still capable of causing serious injuries. Before you put the tool to work, take a few seconds to ensure it’s actually in working condition.

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