Preventing cuts and lacerations

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 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.

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

One of the most common sources of cuts and lacerations is the use of knives and other cutting tools. Below are suggestions for knife and 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.

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