



Give Us a Hand

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I know what you're doing right now. You're reading this – and turning the pages, a task that is easy because you have working hands. But what if you didn't? How would you turn on light switches if your hand was bandaged up? How would you swipe your phone's screen? Tie your shoes? Button your shirt?

In 2014, 13% of all workplace injuries reported to the Bureau of Labor Statistics involved hands. 8% of the cases resulting in a month or more off of work were hand-related. 74% of the injuries where a body part was caught in something resulted in hand damage, and 21% of all hand injuries were from a hand being caught in something. The most common injuries: cuts from machinery.

The problems we've seen:

- An employee tried to stop a fan belt with his hand. He lost the tip of his finger.
- An employee used a single edge razor blade to cut plastic straps. He cut towards himself, resulting in a laceration that required over ten stitches.
- An employee was compressing a coil spring, when it snapped and broke his finger.
- An employee was handling a piece of sheet metal. It slipped, deeply cutting his hand and forearm, slicing tendons and nerves. He still has all of his fingers, but he can no longer make a fist.

Were any of these avoidable? Yes. Are they expensive? Yes. OSHA estimates that one laceration can have costs of nearly \$20,000. With a 3% profit margin, you'd need to make an additional \$760,000 in sales, to make up for the income you've lost from that injury.

How can you and your workers protect their hands?



Photo courtesy of US Navy

- Guard equipment. Anything with exposed moving parts or pulleys should be guarded.
- Turn off and lock out equipment. Control hazardous energy. If the worker who lost his finger tip to a fan belt had waited for the belt to come to a complete stop, instead of grabbing it while it was still moving, he'd still have all ten finger tips.
- Provide appropriate gloves. Mechanic's gloves are great for preventing abrasions and might provide some protection against a hot exhaust pipe, but won't protect against chemical exposure. Nitrile gloves protect

against isocyanates, but won't work if employees are rinsing paint guns in lacquer thinner. Foil laminate gloves protect against thinner, but make it hard to pick up small parts. Electrician's gloves are good for protection against shock, but a pinhole leak renders them ineffective. And if you're working with rotating parts, no gloves at all are usually best.

As the employer, you have the responsibility to provide appropriate personal protective equipment for your employees. That includes providing appropriate gloves.

- Require the use of the right tools for the job, and that tools be kept in good condition. A razor blade might be a convenient way to cut a strap, but it isn't designed for that. Use a safety knife instead. Instead of reaching into an engine compartment to retrieve a fallen bolt, use a magnetic pole.
- Encourage your workers to leave rings and watches at home or in their lockers. More than one mechanic has a ring-shaped burn, because his gold ring came in contact with a battery terminal – or a wrench touched both a battery terminal and his ring.



If you have questions about hand safety, personal protective equipment, hazard prevention, handling worker injuries, OSHA grants, or general safety issues, call CHESS at 651-481-9787 or e-mail us at CHESS@chess-safety.com

This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com

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