

FIVE-MINUTE SAFETY TALK

Hand Protection

Two of the most intricately designed instruments that we work with are our hands. We probably couldn't use any other devices that can take the beatings our hands take and still turn out precision maneuvers.

Like most things of marvel, we have come to take our hands for granted - except when we get our finger's pinched in a door. Then we remember that our hands are not only present but sensitive, too. Unfortunately, we soon forget this experience and start taking them for granted again.

It might surprise you to know that hand injuries account for one third of the two million disabling on-the-job accidents which occur each year (USA). Most of these hand injuries are caused by pinch points - 80 per cent of them, in fact.

Pinch points have the nasty habit of catching us when we aren't looking, or more appropriately stated, when we're not paying attention. Pinch points can be avoided by being aware of their existence and then taking the proper precautions.

Another precaution to take for hand protection is to wear approved work gloves when handling rough materials and during other operations where your hands are directly involved in the lifting or moving of objects. Still other safety measures include taking time to remove or bend down protruding nails, splinters, and sharp edges on materials you're going to be working with.

Of course, machine guards and the special tools given you to perform your job should be utilized. When you don't lock out machinery which you have to reach into, or when you remove a guard and don't replace it, you're positively shortening the odds that you'll be injured, and any bet you make against your self is a poor one.

Hand protection isn't anything new. It's been considered important for years. In medieval times, knights wore armored gauntlet gloves. Later, the bare-knuckled prize fighters discovered it was easier on both parties involved if their hands were covered when they squared off. And as the game of baseball developed, the fielder's gloves evolved from a skimpy piece of leather into something with considerably more padding.

Despite any precautions we may take, our hands are going to receive minor injuries from time to time, and I caution you to be treated for these cuts and scratches, as they can develop into something more serious.

However, a little foresight will go a long way toward keeping the skin on your hands. For instance, if you're moving an object, either on a hand truck or carrying it, make sure the doorways and aisles are wide enough to move through safely before starting the job. Make sure that you have proper hand clearance and be equally cautious when setting down your load.

It's advisable to keep your hands free of grease and oil. Slippery hands can get you into trouble, so if you get grease on them, clean them up right away.

We've probably all joked at some time or another that our troubles began when we put on a wedding ring. This could actually be the truth in reference to our jobs. For safety's sake, don't wear rings while you're working. They can very easily catch on machinery and other objects, resulting in a badly cut finger or worse.

Pulleys and belts form other pinch points and should be covered with guards. If it should become necessary for you to pick up broken glass, nails, or other sharp objects, wear gloves for the job or sweep it up. Never attempt to handle these things with your bare hands. So, a good thing to always keep in mind is that your hands are fearless. They'll go anyplace they're sent and they'll act only as wisely as the person they belong to.