



## TOOL BOX TALKS



### CHOOSING SAFER HAND TOOLS IN CONSTRUCTION

Construction workers use many hand tools, such as, hammers, screwdrivers, pliers, tin snips, and a variety of power tools.

#### THE HAZARDS

If you use hand tools over and over every day, you can injure your hand, wrist, or arm. You can do this if you must hold a tool tightly for a long time or keep twisting the handle. You can get carpal tunnel syndrome, trigger finger, white finger, and other painful problems. These can force you to quit construction work.

#### WHEN YOU BUY A HAND TOOL:

- Look for a tool that needs **less force** to use.
- Look for a tool that **weighs less**. It can put less stress on your hand. (On some jobs you may need a heavier tool for more force.)
- Look for a tool that is **balanced**, that doesn't tip forward or backward when you hold it.
- **Look at the handle:**
  - It should not conduct electricity or heat. It should be comfortable in your hand, not too thick or too small or too short.
  - It should not hurt your hand when you hold it firmly. You do not want sharp edges.
  - If you can, get a non-slip handle. If you can, get a handle with a cover made of soft materials. Ridges on a handle can hurt your hand. Consider a rubber or plastic sleeve for the handle to make it safer.
- If you need to use a lot of force on the job, the handle should be **long enough for your whole hand** — not just your fingers. (You want a "power grip," not just a "pinch grip.") You can use a long handle as a lever to add to the force of a tool and save your hand.
- You may need a bigger handle if you wear **gloves** when you use the tool. Try not to use tools with your wrist bent. An ergonomically designed tool with a curved handle may let you keep your wrist straight.
- For some tools, the handle should have a **spring return**. The spring return can cut the wear on your hand. This saves wear and tear on your finger muscles.

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- A **bent angle or adjustable angle** on some tools can help you keep your wrist straight. (You don't want a bent angle for some jobs.) When you work overhead, you may need different tools so you can keep your wrist straight.
- A power tool should have a long trigger, so you can use more than one finger at a time.
- Get a power tool with reduced vibration and noise levels. Too much vibration can damage the nerves in your hand and cause "white finger." If a tool vibrates, you have to grip harder and can hurt your muscles.
- If more than one person will use a tool, try to find one that's comfortable for everyone to hold. You may need different tools for left-handed and right-handed workers and for workers with big and small hands.

### WHEN YOU USE A HAND TOOL

- Keep the tool sharp and in good condition. This way, you can reduce the force you must use on the tool — and reduce stress on your hands and wrist.
- Try to rest your hands during the day. Even a perfect tool can hurt you if you must use it over and over.
- Lay down the tool or put it in a holster when you don't need it.
- If a tool stand is provided, use it to support the weight of the tool to minimize awkward postures and reduce the forces needed to steady the tool.

### YOU SHOULD KNOW

- One tool cannot do all jobs. If you try to use a tool for a job it was not designed for, the job will be harder to do.
- Many tools in the stores are labeled "ergonomic" tools; don't be fooled. You are the one who can tell if a tool is comfortable and easy to use.
- How you use a tool is as important as which tool you use. Try not to use one tool a long time doing the same thing over and over without a rest break.
- Try many tools until you find one you like. Everyone has a different hand size, strength, and preferences.
- A good hand tool improves productivity; it helps you get your job done well.

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