

Power Tool Safety at Work: Protecting People, Productivity and Property

Power tools play an essential role in many industries, including construction, manufacturing and maintenance. Examples of some power tools include circular saws, drill presses, bench grinders, air hammers/chisels, concrete drills and torque wrenches. Even though these tools increase efficiency, they also introduce risks when not used properly. Injuries such as lacerations, eye injuries, musculoskeletal disorders (MSD's), amputations and even hearing loss can lead to lost time, costly claims and long-term physical harm. So, it is important that employers create a strong culture of power tool safety to ensure a safe workplace.

An effective way to develop training on power tool safety is to review the safe work procedures outlined in the manufacturer's recommendations. Let's look at some commonly used safety practices and recommendations:

1. Understand the hazards that power tools can expose workers to, including:
 - Lacerations and punctures from sharp or fast-moving blades or bits.
 - Electrocutation from damaged cords or improper grounding.
 - Eye injuries from flying debris.
 - Hearing damage from loud or prolonged operation.
 - Ergonomic injuries from vibration or awkward handling.
 - Fire hazards from sparks or overheating motors.

Encourage employees to stay alert and make safe decisions when operating the power tool.

2. Inspect tools before, during and after use. Employees should look for:
 - Damaged or missing guards.
 - Cracked housing.
 - Frayed electrical cords or exposed wiring.
 - Battery damage or leaks.
 - Properly functioning switches and controls.
 - Excessive noise, vibration or overheating.

If you find something wrong with the tool, stop using it immediately, tag it and remove it from service.

3. Incorrect use of a power tool is one of the most common reasons for injury. When operating tools, employees should:
 - Select the tool specifically designed for the task.
 - Avoid forcing a tool beyond its intended capacity.
 - Ensure accessories, such as bits, blades and discs are the correct size and type.
 - Never modify or remove safety guards.

The "right tool for the job" mindset reduces injury risk and helps prevent tool damage.

4. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) acts as a layer of defense and employees must ensure they wear the appropriate PPE, which may include:
 - Safety glasses and / or face shields.
 - Cut-resistant or impact-resistant gloves.
 - Hearing protection such as earplugs or earmuffs
 - Steel-toed boots.
 - Dust masks or respirators.

Workers must be trained on the appropriate PPE to use for the specific tool, potential hazards and work environment.

5. Long-term safety requires regular attention to equipment, proper storage and maintenance. To achieve this, employees can:
 - Store tools in clean, dry, secure areas.
 - Keep cutting tools sharpened to reduce kickback.
 - Follow manufacturer maintenance schedules.
 - Recharge and store batteries correctly.
 - Perform regular inspections for safe operation.

A proactive maintenance program reduces downtime and protects workers from preventable hazards.

6. Safety relies on open communication so employers should encourage employees to:
 - Report damaged tools.
 - Notify supervisors of unsafe usage.
 - Ask for assistance if needed.
 - Participate in refresher training.
 - Share near-miss incidents to prevent future accidents.

Organizations benefit when safety becomes a shared responsibility rather than an individual task.

Power tools make work efficient but they require respect, training and care. By understanding hazards, using proper PPE, inspecting tools and maintaining clean work environments, employees can dramatically reduce the risk of accidents. For employers, promoting a culture of safety not only protects their workforce but also improves performance, reduces costs and strengthens compliance.

If you would like to know more about Sedgwick's safety services or would like to schedule a confidential consultation, please contact Andy Sawan at andrew.sawan@sedgwick.com or 330-819-4728.