

Knuckle Down on Hand Safety

Just for one day—say, tomorrow—try paying attention to what your hands do. Start from the time you turn off the alarm clock. Really notice what you do with your hands, while you are shaving, washing, dressing, eating, driving, working, writing, etc. Make yourself conscious of your hands all day long. Then picture what your life would be like if you lost even the partial use of a hand. Can you afford to take your hands for granted? They come just one pair to a customer. They are the only hands you'll ever have, so take care of them.

You don't have to have a serious accident to temporarily lose the full use of your hands. Think back to any time when you had a relatively minor injury such as a torn fingernail, or a cut that make it painful or awkward to use you hand or fingers freely. Do you remember how helpless you felt trying to write your name, use a knife and for, button your shirt, or do any of the simple everyday things that you normally take for granted?

An informal survey of a number of employees who suffered hand injuries revealed that they knew their jobs. They also knew their job hazards. But in one cause after another, the trouble was that they forgot. They just didn't think. Knowing the right way to to a job is important of course. But just knowing is not enough. You have to remember and use that knowledge.

In general, handling materials is one of the major sources of hand injuries. These accidents don't have to happen. Most hand safety rules, when you take a good look at them, are only common sense. Let's go over a few:

You know how easy it is for wet soap to slip out of your hands. For the same reason, it makes good sense to wipe off any object that is wet, greasy, slippery, or dirty before you pick it up. Also, before you handle any material, look it over for slivers, burrs, jagged edges, and rough surfaces.

Especially important, watch out for pinch points. The majority of hand injuries happen when your hand and fingers get caught between two objects.

Keep your fingers in the clear when you're setting setting down a heavy object, when you're piling material, when you're handling slings and chains, and when you're using tools such as pry bars, levers, and wrenches. Watch out for points of contact—where the teeth of moving gears mesh together, around all moving equipment, and anyplace else where two objects meet.

Hands are naturally exposed to injury, probably more than any other part of the body, simply because we use them so often. That's all the more reason to develop "hand consciousness" and to protect them.

Any time the safe way seems like a little too much time or trouble, any time you're tempted to take a chance or a shortcut "just this once," remember that you may have to live with the consequences for the rest of your life