

# LOSS CONTROL TOOL CHEST

## Loss Control Department “Cuts and Lacerations”

Cuts and lacerations account for most of the traumatic injuries that occur in the workplace, even though they are less severe than the average non-fatal injury or illness. Of the 3.6 million work-related injuries treated in emergency rooms across the United States each year, hands and fingers are the most commonly-treated body parts, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

When we think of causes for cut and laceration injuries, we think in terms of manual cutting situations (such as, when an employee uses a knife or scissors) and automated cutting or machinery injuries (such as, mixers, electric slicers, etc.). It does not take a lot of imagination to visualize the sources of these injuries.

In fact, every job has its own hazards that can lead to injuries, if workers are not careful. In offices, workers are subject to cuts and lacerations by handling paper. In packaging and shipping departments, the dangers of protruding nails, screws, staples, splinters, and steel bands are present. In production shops, flat metal sheets can have very sharp edges, and the scraps remaining after sheet metal is cut can cause cuts and punctures. Hand tools, such as, screwdrivers, drawing knives, saws, planes, files, drills, punches, and scrapers can puncture or cut. Machine tools, such as, circular saws, band saws, planers, joiners, sanders, drills, lathes, shapers, and grinding wheels can also cut and lacerate. Other items in the manufacturing process, such as, machine parts, castings, stamping, rods, and bar stock may have hazardous edges and corners. Food industry workers are susceptible to cuts and lacerations resulting from the use of knives, band saws, slicers, blenders, and broken glass.

Hazards can be reduced when equipment is maintained and used properly and when Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is provided and worn. The use of gloves for various work functions will minimize the potential injury except when hands are near revolving machine parts – where a glove can become caught and fingers or hands can be pulled into a machine.

### THE CAUSES OF CUTS AND LACERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

#### Manual Cutting Causes

- Personal Protective Equipment (for example, cut-resistant gloves) not provided
  - Cut-resistant gloves are not cut-proof – they offer protection from cuts but do not completely eliminate the potential for cuts
- Pulling cutting utensil towards self
- Catching falling utensil
- Keeping fingers out of the way

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## **Automated Cutting Systems**

- Machine guards are removed, missing or broken
- Adjustments are made while a machine is in operation
- Machine is cleaned while in operation
- Clearing jams while machine is running
- Not using a push stick
- Protective gloves can get caught in moving machinery and pull an employee's fingers or hand into the machine

## **Condition of Equipment**

- Knives and scissors are not maintained in top condition
- Saw blades, grinding wheels, and machine tools are not inspected or replaced when necessary
- Equipment (especially, knives, box cutters, and scissors) is poorly designed, which can result in an awkward grip or hand position

## **Workstation Design**

- Employee workstations are not adjustable, which can result in awkward working positions
- Improper storage of knives and hand tools
- Employees work too close together, which can result in cuts to adjacent employees
- Inadequate lighting
- Cutting objects are held in an employee's hand instead of on a stable, hard cutting surface
- Busy or "rush work periods" encourage employees to work faster, often at the expense of working safely

## **Distractions**

- Employees need to focus on the task that they are performing – distractions including loud noises, music, and poor lighting can divert an employee's attention, which increases the risk for cuts and lacerations. Never approach, or try to get the attention of someone working unless it's an emergency.

## **MINIMIZING HAZARDS**

Workers should be involved in minimizing hazards in the workplace. They are the ones who know and understand the equipment, tools, procedures, and demands of the job and are more likely to support a safety measure if they participate in the creation of a safety regulation or program. Without their input and involvement, a safety program will not be successful.

Machine guards, lockout/tag out procedures, removing pinch points and sharp edges from

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the workplace, safe work procedures, and safety training programs will reduce hand injuries. Cal/OSHA provides excellent guidelines for designing guards and barriers.

## STEPS TO PREVENT CUTS AND LACERATIONS

### Equipment – Condition and Design

- Keep hand tools (knives and scissors) sharp and in good condition
- Inspect machinery on a regular basis to guarantee that point of operations guards are in place
- Remove damaged equipment from service
- Use the appropriate equipment for the job
- Use knives with a comfortable handle
- Use an angled, handle-blade design to reduce awkward body positions

### Protective Personal Equipment (PPE)

- Provide and use cut resistant gloves
- Maintain gloves so that they are in good condition
- Remove damaged gloves from service – replace when necessary