

## HAND SAFETY

It does not matter if your collar is blue or white, where you work, or what you do. The truth is that you use your hands for a large part of your job every day. From dialing the phone to typing to operating machinery, your hands constitute an important part of your livelihood. Since we use our hands so much, they are constantly exposed to hazards. When you consider the extent of our hand use, it is no wonder that 25% of all work-related injuries involve hands. Think for a moment about what your life would be like if you had limited use of one or both hands. What about your quality of life? Could you still perform simple tasks, such as, buttoning your shirt, opening a jar of peanut butter, or tying your shoelaces? This is why it is critical to take good care of your hands.

### **GUARDS**

Many of the machines in your work environment are powerful and have the ability to cause serious damage to your hands. When guards are manipulated or removed, they do not offer the protection for which they were originally designed. Make sure that you are properly trained before using any machinery and NEVER remove or manipulate a guard. At times, it may seem as if guards are restricting, but never forget how restricting life could be without hands.

### **CUMULATIVE TRAUMA**

When you use your hands every day, they can be pushed beyond their limit – especially when experiencing increased workloads. When repeating the same task over and over for many days (assembly line work, typing, painting, etc.), hands can suffer from cumulative trauma injuries, such as, carpal tunnel syndrome. This repetitive motion type injury can be prevented by taking several small breaks throughout the day to relax and also stretch fingers and thumbs. In addition, you should change positions frequently and alternate tasks.

### **GLOVES**

A common and effective way to prevent hand injuries is the use of gloves. Gloves can help to prevent lacerations, abrasions, pinches, punctures, chemical burns, thermal burns, temperature extremes, and skin absorption of harmful substances. Each of these hazards requires a different type of glove. Be sure that you select the right type of glove for the job. If you are not sure what type of glove is appropriate, ask a supervisor.

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### HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT GLOVES

The type of gloves that you use should be job/task appropriate to address functionality and also offer protection from specific hazards that you will encounter while doing the job. The following questions should help you determine the right kind of glove for the job:

- Do you need to be protected from physical trauma, for example, lacerations?
- Will you encounter chemicals?
- Do you need to be able to grip?
- How much dexterity and flexibility are required?
- Do the gloves need to be insulated?
- Do the gloves fit properly?
- How much of the hand, wrist, and arm should be covered by the gloves?

While gloves help prevent injuries, there are certain times where wearing gloves creates a greater hazard than not wearing them. You need to remove gloves if there is a risk of them being caught and pulled into moving parts of machinery. When working around machines with rotating parts, remove gloves and do not wear long sleeves or jewelry (rings or bracelets). These types of injuries can be horrific – so always be mindful of when to leave the gloves off.

Also, keep in mind that while gloves protect your hands, they do not make them invincible. You still need to use caution while performing hazardous work with your hands. When gloves are damaged or worn out, they no longer offer protection. Always inspect your gloves before you use them to make sure they are in good condition. Never forget to practice hand safety. Before starting any job that could place your hands at risk, take a moment to consider the safest way to perform the job.