



Knife Safety

Statistics indicate that knives are more frequently the source of disabling injuries than any other hand tool. People in all occupations are injured by knives—the high school student working in the supermarket produce department, the retail store employee who attempts to open a box, the slaughterhouse worker, the salad chef. Actually, all of us are frequently exposed to knife injuries for no other reason than the fact that a knife is a very useful and therefore much-used tool.

By the time we were old enough to work, most of us had already learned the basic dangers associated with knives. Hiking, camping, or just plain whittling usually bring on enough accidental cuts to acquaint a young person with some of those realities. But we didn't always learn the safety precautions as quickly.

The principal hazard in using a knife in industry, safety experts have concluded, is that the user's hand may slip from the handle onto the blade, causing a painful and possibly serious injury. Keeping handles dry and non-greasy will help prevent this mishap. A handle guard will eliminate this hazard.

Another cause for injury is the knife's striking the free hand or the body. When using a knife, the cutting stroke should be away from the body whenever possible. Otherwise, adequate protection should be worn to protect the body. Mail gloves are available for selected industries such as meat packing, where materials must be held close to where the knife will cut. Provisions should also be made to hold materials steady.

If it's necessary to carry a knife on the job, it should be in a sheath or holder. Safety experts recommend that the sheath be worn over the right or left hip and toward the back. A knife carried in front or over the leg could cause a serious injury in a fall.

Storage of knives is an important safety factor, too. Exposed cutting edges should be covered, and knives should be kept in their proper place, not left on benches or on the floor.

First aid is very important if you are cut by a knife. Even the smallest cut should be treated to help avoid infection. Injury records are full of cases in which someone neglected a small injury and blood poisoning developed, causing several weeks of lost time from the job.

One of the more publicized cases occurred many years ago when the son of Calvin Coolidge died from a blister that was neglected. Certainly, any serious complications from a cut are even more tragic these days when there are so many first-aid treatments available.

It's often said that there's nothing more painful than getting cut with a dull knife. That may be a slight exaggeration, but it brings up a good point—keep knives sharp and in good condition. A dull knife can cause you to put too much pressure on the object you're trying to cut, and the blade could slip and slice you or someone nearby.

Never use a knife that is defective—for instance, one that has a broken handle or blade. Of course, a sure way to break a knife is to throw it or use it as a screwdriver. Use your knife only for what it was meant to do.



If you're using the right knife for the job, it should cut without difficulty. When you have to resort to sheer force to make a knife cut, you're headed for trouble: damage to the knife or to the material you're attempting to cut or, worst of all, injury to yourself or someone else.

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