

MAFES Dawg Tracks



November 30, 2009



Power Tool Safety



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY

Power tools are important in most all phases of public work and agriculture should also be included. The United States Consumer Product Safety Division, in a hazard screening report, states that in 2001 there were more than 418,000 emergency room injuries associated with power tools and workshop injuries. The majority of these occurred in the male population and included professionals and amateurs.

Every time that we turn on a power tool of any size or description, we stand a chance of running a giant risk of putting our body in harm's way. Our primary responsibility, before we use any type of power tool, is to read the owner's manual.

Becoming totally familiar with the contents of the manual will help to reduce the potential for serious injury. In addition to getting totally familiar with the owner's manual, there are Seven Golden Rules of Power Tool Safety that complements the instructions in the owner's manual as an additional tool for your safety. Following are these rules:

- ***You are the Most Dangerous Power Tool –***

Users of various types of power tools debate over which type is the most dangerous. However, there is wide spread agreement that the most dangerous tool is the operator himself, as there are very few cases of a power tool jumping out and attacking an individual. Remember that when you turn on a power tool, it is your responsibility alone to see that at the end of the day you still have five fingers on each hand to take home with you. As obvious as this statement sounds, it is the personality that takes the arrogant attitude that I'm a pro and it won't happen to me, or maybe someone else could lose one of his fingers, but not me.

- ***All Tools are Equally Dangerous, but Some are More Frequently Harmful –***

Every tool in your box can be dangerous if you forget the cardinal rule. Most definitely there are some tools that cause more frequent trips to the emergency room. The table saw is widely considered one of the most frequent manglers of fingers, along with the radial arm saw, the shaper and the chain saw.

- ***Keep Your Tools Sharp, True, Clean and Running Smooth –***

Tool maintenance is always a critical key in power tool safety. Familiarity with the owner's manual will help you in knowing when and how to sharpen, align and clean that particular tool. As you are working with any power tool, you should be on the lookout and listening mode for any unusual noises that might develop. One of these noises is a signal that some adjustments probably need to be made.

- ***Keep Your Work Space tidy, Well lit and Distraction Free-***
An important aspect of any job site, whether it is a farm shop or basement hobby shop, is to keep it clean and organized. The cleaner and more tidy the shop is means that you are decreasing the potential for a slip, trip or fall injury, because there is no debris or scrap left on the floor. By forming habits of cleaning up after each project means that you are well on your way to preventing any major problems with the possibility of work-site accidents. Strong lighting is another vital aspect of power tool operation as it keeps the fingers away from the blade and shows you where the blade is at all times. Finally, make sure that there are no distractions around like loud music or cell phones that may get you unfocused from your work.
- ***Purchase or Make the Appropriate Safety Accessories –***
Woodworkers and others that use saws frequently use push sticks, feather boards or push blocks to insure accuracy in their cutting while these aids assist in keeping their fingers away from the blades. Many power tools have factory devised safety guards, but it is still up to the individual to make sure that the safety aids are in place and functional. Total familiarity with the tool and its operation will enable the operator to use it effectively and safely for their protection.
- ***Keep a First Aid Kit Handy –***
It is imperative that we keep a well supplied first aid kit in the close proximity of the shop working area. We don't want to admit it, but in case of a catastrophic accident, we should keep some clean, sanitary bags in the area of the first aid kit - in case of a severe cut, like a missing finger, to transport the member with the victim. A hand mirror is another item that could be very useful - in case a person should experience a facial injury he or she can check out the degree of damage.
- ***Always Trust Your Instincts –***
Experienced power tool users or operators will normally feel a little twinge of conscience, like any person working that has that premonition that something isn't right. If this happens, obviously, you want to stop and survey the situation to make corrections for what you feel isn't correct. Avoid shortcuts that you aren't accustomed to, which sometimes can cause an accident, because you are possibly using a method not practical for the job and can alter a safety feature.

**THOSE PRECIOUS FINGERS-
DON'T IGNORE—OR
THEY COULD END UP ON
THE FLOOR!**