

Hand Safety

By Shannon Smith

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, about half of all hand injuries are lacerations. Seventy percent of workers who experienced hand injuries were not wearing gloves. The remaining 30 percent were wearing gloves, but they were damaged, or inadequate for the type of task (wrong glove for the job).

When I started with TDI, the only gloves available on the boat were either the cotton cloth gloves that really didn't protect from anything and leather gloves, which were completely inappropriate for a wet and muddy environment. You would wear them once, they would become soggy and covered with mud, making it even harder to hold onto or work with equipment than using bare hands. They would get worn once or twice and wind up discarded on the deck.

One of our clients gave us different types of gloves to try out during one of their projects. They fit well, dried fast and had neoprene coatings on the palms and fingers to give better grip and feel for the tools being used. Others had impact resistant backs and vibration dampening pads on the palms.

The difference was amazing! Wearing gloves before had been a nuisance and impeded the work. The right type of gloves made it easier to hang on to muddy gear while protecting hands from scrapes and cuts.

We started investing in better quality gloves suited to the type of work done. Soon even those most resistant to wearing gloves before were writing their names on them and using them regularly.

So, lessons learned from that experience were:

- ◆ PPE that no one uses is a waste of money, not a money saver!
- ◆ Gloves are made for specific types of tasks– use the right kind for yours.
- ◆ The right type and fit of glove will make it EASIER to do your work, not harder!

Hand Injuries

Several years ago we had local contractors working on our vessel at the dock. One worker had been trying to repair a bent metal door plate with no gloves.



How would a permanent hand injury affect your ability to make a living?



**Hand protection
must be worn**

TOP Safety Card Hits
(Fleetwide last month)

Housekeeping 2

Tools & Equipment 1

Maintenance 1

Communications 1

Hand Injuries (Continued)

He was drilling a piece of sheet metal when the bit caught and spun the metal edge against his hand, cutting a one by 2 inch wide laceration through the skin and into the muscle of his palm.

He didn't want to lose the opportunity to work, so he wrapped the hand tightly and continued working. Another worker noticed the rag and asked what happened. She rinsed the wound with hydrogen peroxide (NEVER use hydrogen peroxide on deep cuts or open wounds—it damages healthy internal tissues!) and put a large Band Aid on it.

The next day I overheard some workers talking about it and asked to see the wound. By this time his hand had doubled in size and was red. I took him to the emergency room to get it treated. Because of the delay in treatment and to prevent further infection, the nurse had to soak and scrape the inside of the wound to clean out damaged tissue. Even with local pain killers, it was a painful procedure.

The worker was really unhappy about losing a few days work. He risked a serious infection and possible long term damage to his hand because 1. He wasn't wearing proper PPE 2. He didn't want to report an injury 3. He didn't want to lose a few days wages.

The day after the injury, he couldn't fully close or open his hand. All I could think was, what would have happened if I hadn't discovered the injury, or only discovered it after deep infection had set in? He needed his hands to make a living and support his family. A recovery from infection alone could have cost him weeks or months or work.

First Aid Treatment for Hand Injuries

- Minor scrapes and scratches occur on the surface of the skin. For these it is best to wash with mild soap and water and leave uncovered.
- Deeper cuts may require gentle pressure to stop bleeding. Rinse the wound with clear water and wash the skin around it gently with mild soap and water. Apply a thin layer of antibiotic to the wound and cover with a bandage to keep the wound moist and dirt out. Change the bandage when it becomes wet or dirty— daily at a minimum.
- Contact ISOS for medical advice if:
 - The bleeding won't stop
 - The wound edges are separated— especially if you see fat or muscle tissue
 - If there is dirt, debris or torn tissue in the wound
 - If there is possibility of underlying damage— nerves, tendons, muscle



Hydrogen peroxide damages all types of cells—good as well as bad. It should only be used to clean skin around the infected area just after the injury and never inside a deep cut or wound. The “bubbling” action is a result of cell destruction. Prolonged use increases scarring and time required to heal.