

Using hand tools in ways they are not intended for can lead to injuries that could easily be avoided, and replacing worn tools is relatively inexpensive when compared to accident-related downtime.


Many times this column has addressed the safety hazards associated with gear cutting and hob sharpening machines. I would feel remiss if we did not spend some time addressing the safety hazards associated with the hand tools. Every one of us commonly uses a variety of hand tools every day that we work, but if you are like me, you never give a thought to the hazards that present themselves with the use of hand tools. There are many hazards associated with the use of hand tools, not the least of which is carelessness. It is very easy to become complacent when using the common hand tools that we all use every day. Such a simple thing as a screwdriver tip that is damaged can cause the screwdriver to slip. Unfortunately, I have seen people stab themselves when a screwdriver slipped. I also see screwdrivers used as chisels or pry bars. It is obvious that this creates an unsafe situation. We have all been party to using an adjustable wrench when it would be a lot safer to use the proper size open-end wrench, and that wrench is easily available but we are too lazy to go get it. How many of you have used a “cheater” on a wrench, because you did not want to take the time to get a wrench of the proper length to tighten or loosen a bolt? Have you ever had a wrench slip out of your hands due to you not taking time to wipe the oil or grease off of your hands? I would bet that all of you have

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been in this situation. I often see operators using a hammer to strike wrenches in order to tighten bolts or nuts. Think about it: This is an accident just waiting to happen. We could talk about the misuse of hammers all day long. One of my favorites is the use of a carpenter’s claw hammer being used as a striking tool on a hardened punch or chisel. When that hammer head chips, the chip will often strike someone standing nearby and seriously injure them. I am sure that

you can add your own hammer stories to this list. Other tools that are often misused are punches and chisels. Are your punches and chisels chipped, bent, or otherwise in an unsafe condition?

I suggest that you take the time right now to look over your hand tools. Are they greasy? Are they chipped or damaged? Now is the time to clean and replace tools that have seen better days. The small investment that may be required is certainly a whole lot cheaper than dealing with an injury. If you are a foreman or a shop manager, you must realize that a large portion of your responsibilities lie in keeping your personnel safe. An injured employee costs the company in many ways, including lost production.

I was recently reading an article in the October issue of *Modern Machine Shop*—which gives you an idea of how far behind I am in my reading. The article is titled “Involving Operators in the Maintenance Process,” and it offers some very interesting insights into easy and simple methods to involve the machine operators in the maintenance process without making them feel that they are required to do their own maintenance. And, as I have stated many times in this column, a well-maintained machine is a safer machine. I recommend that you obtain a copy of this article and see what steps you can add to your procedures that will increase the safety and maintenance of your equipment. 

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