



Safety Scene

It's Hammer Time!

Before hammering it out, make sure you consider these important safety tips.

by Molly E. Butz

The hammer is one of the most common tools in use today. And, whether you're setting plates in a component manufacturing plant or working on your favorite hobby at home, it's easy to lose sight of the dangers this basic tool can present.

While hammer safety may seem like second nature, statistics show that hammers are a very common cause of injury when they are not used properly. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 40,000 people were treated by hospital personnel in 1998 due to hammer-related injuries. To avoid these injuries at work or at play, here are few hammer safety guidelines that you should follow:



1. Always wear eye protection when using a hammer.
2. Prior to using it, make sure the handle of your hammer fits tightly on its head and does not feel loose when you swing it. If the handle, head or claw of your hammer is chipped, cracked or loose, it must be repaired before using.
3. Do not use metal hammers when striking anything made of concrete, stone or hard metal, such as component tables, rollers or other machinery. Doing so may chip off small pieces, which could cause injury.
4. The handle of the hammer should not be used as a pry bar, or to strike. Wooden and fiberglass handles may split or break apart (which could cut or pinch you) and steel handles can shatter.
5. Strike surfaces squarely with your hammer, and try to avoid glancing blows.
6. Never strike another hammer with your hammer.

Get a Grip!

Having the proper grip on your hammer is very important. Practice grasping it lightly, but firmly, and avoid holding your hammer too tightly to help prevent fatigue and injury to your wrist and arm. For heavier hitting, hold the hammer toward the bottom of the handle. For lighter hitting, grip the middle of the handle.

at a glance

- ❑ Even though a hammer is a basic tool, it can be dangerous if not used properly.
- ❑ For heavier hitting, hold the hammer toward the bottom of the handle. For lighter hitting, grip the middle of the handle.
- ❑ Keep your wrist straight and use your whole arm to create the force behind hammering.

Swinging your hammer properly will help you avoid injuries as well as prevent damage to the surface you are striking. Keep your wrist straight and use your whole arm to create the force behind hammering. This allows the head's weight to build momentum as it moves toward the nail or metal connector plate.

A Hammer for Every Season

It's also important to realize that there are many different types of hammers, each designed to accomplish a different task. Deciding what type of hammer is best for the job you are asked to do can require some thought.

If you need a hammer to pull out nails, you may want to consider one with a curved claw. You might use a curved claw hammer to pull wood jiggling blocks out of a component table or remove nails from a wall panel. By comparison, rip claw hammers have straighter claws, and although they can also be used to pull out nails, they're better if you need to perform tasks like lifting boards up to slide truss plates underneath or prying boards apart.

There may be circumstances while building wall panels or performing miscellaneous tasks at a component manufacturing plant for which a waffle-face hammer would be appropriate, however it's far more likely you'll need a smooth-face hammer. It's important to note that if you'll be using your hammer on metal connector plates, a waffle-face hammer would damage the plates, which is why a smooth-face hammer is typically required.

In the Long Run

Now that you have a good foundation for choosing and using the right hammer for the job, there are just a few other maintenance and housekeeping procedures you can use to keep your hammers in tip top shape.

Keep your hammer clean and in good working condition. Loose parts, broken handles and worn out rubber hand grips (on fiberglass and steel handles) can lead to injury. As you use your hammer throughout the day, remember to return it to your hammer loop or other designated place after each use; hammers left sitting out can get caught up in machinery or cause someone to trip. And most importantly, never use a hammer for a purpose other than its designed task; horseplay is not an option and misuse can result in damaged property, broken tools and injury.

Remember, hammers may be common, but they can also be dangerous. Don't let their low-tech nature fool you. Safety First! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@sbcindustry.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at www.wtcalco.com.



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