

Tools of the Trade

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For nearly every activity in construction, there's a tool designed to do the job. Using the right tool makes it easier and safer for you to do each job. Unfortunately, many workers routinely use tools and don't consider them dangerous, so accidents continue to happen. The greatest hazards posed by tools are from misuse and improper maintenance. It's up to you to select the right tool for the job, use it the way it was designed, and care for it properly.

A well-designed tool is easy to identify. It has just the right grip, proper weight and balance, proper fittings, dimensions, and size. There's also a right way to use each tool which may require you to apply certain movements or pressure and specific angles or slants for the tool to perform most efficiently. If the tool is sharp, heavy or if it could generate any flying objects, proper personal protective equipment should be worn such as hand, eye or face, and foot protection. Also, when using a tool it important to be aware of workers around you, so an accident doesn't injure them.

When using any type of tool, there are some general safety practices to follow.

- Select the right tool for the job.
- Inspect the tool for defects before and after use.
- Keep tool guards in place.
- Replace or repair broken tools and parts.
- Keep tools in good condition and properly stored.

Although there are many different kinds of hand tools used in construction, here are safety tips for some of the most common tools used:

- Hammers - Use the hammer designed for the job. Use a claw hammer for carpentry work and a machinist's hammer for machine work. Keep in mind that sledge hammers and mauls require plenty of clearance room around you, so always look behind you before beginning a back swing.
- Wrenches - When using a wrench, it's usually safer to pull it rather than push it. When pulling down on a wrench from overhead, stand to one side so you won't get hit or hurt if it slips coming down. If pushing the wrench is necessary, do it with an open palm. If you're using an adjustable wrench, exert pressure toward the movable jaw. It's safer for you to avoid using pipe extensions. It's better to use the proper size wrench instead. Never hammer on a wrench. It could cause it to break unexpectedly.
- Saws - Keep your saw sharp and free of rust. A sharp, clean saw is less likely to bind or jump.
- Files - Never use a file without a handle. Because a file is brittle it can easily break, so don't use a file as a pry. It's not worth the accident risk.
- Pry bars - Make sure your feet and body are well balanced before exerting full force on the bar. Good balance can prevent you from falling and injuring yourself if the pry should slip.

Whenever you're not familiar with a tool, ask your supervisor to show you how to use it correctly. If you don't have the right tool for a job, wait until you can get one. Improvisation may be fine for a comedian's work but not for safe construction work. □