

Utility Knife Safety

Loss Control Bulletin

Box cutters and other utility knives are among the most common hand tools used in business. They are typically small, lightweight, and inexpensive, making them ideal portable tools on and off the worksite. These tools feature a sharp blade that can be used to cut or trim paper, cardboard, twine, plastic, and other non-metallic materials.

The same characteristics that make these tools practical to use also make them susceptible to unsafe use and storage by workers. Because of their small sizes, workers tend to carry such knives in pockets or toss them haphazardly in their toolboxes. This can lead to serious lacerations if the knife blade is exposed when a worker retrieves the knife.

Knife Injury Causes

Many injuries attributed to the use of utility knives occur because the wrong type or knife design is used for a particular task. Proper selection of the cutting tool is important in preventing cut injuries. Other causes of injuries from using utility knives include:

- Using a knife with a dull or worn blade
- Applying too much force when cutting
- Cutting in the wrong direction Incorrect positioning of the hands or other body part in relation to the blade or cutting motion
- Improper storage
- Cutting too rapidly
- Hold object to be cut firmly
- Cut in one smooth stroke
- Replace the blade when smooth, uninterrupted cuts are no longer possible
- Wear safety glasses in case the blade breaks
- Replace blade cover when knife is not in use
- Store knife in a sheath or in a proper storage area

Choosing the Right Utility Knife

Evolution of design for utility knives has produced substantial safety improvements. There are varieties of utility knives that include such features as:

- Ergonomically designed handles
- Models specifically designed for left or right-handed users
- Spring loaded retractable blades
- New and used blade storage compartments
- Steel safety guards or partially enclosed blades
- Variable blade exposure adjustment



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Employers should contact a knife manufacturer representative for advice when selecting utility knives for specific business uses. The manufacturer's representative has the technical expertise to guide an employer in selecting the safest knife to use for each application.

If you require additional assistance, please call RepublicIndemnity's loss control department.

Preventing Knife Injuries

- Select the correct type of utility knife
- Hold knife with a firm grip
- Cut away from your body