

Spot The Safety Violation: Watch that Trigger Finger!



Where should this worker's finger be while he's carrying around this nail gun'



Nail guns are very useful power tools, letting workers nail together materials more quickly than they could by using a traditional hammer. But nail guns'like handguns with bullets'can endanger workers if they aren't used properly. For instance, nail guns with contact and single actuation triggers will fire if the trigger is being held and the safety contact tip gets knocked or pushed into an object or person by mistake.

In this picture from the Health and Safety Executive in Great Britain, a worker is carrying around a nail gun with his finger on the trigger. Because he isn't actually using the nail gun, there's no reason for his finger to be on the trigger right now. And because it is, he could easily shoot his co-worker'or himself.

Example: A worker in Alberta was walking while carrying a pneumatic nail gun. His finger was on the trigger. The end of the nail gun rubbed against the side of his leg, shooting a nail into his lower leg. He was transported to the hospital for treatment, remaining there for more than two days.

Bottom line: Your finger should only be on the trigger of a nail gun when you're actually using it. Don't walk around the workplace with your finger on the gun's trigger.

6 STEPS TO PREVENTING NAIL GUN INJURIES

To ensure that your workers don't get injured'or injure someone else'when using nail guns, OSHA recommends that you take these six steps:

Step #1: Use full sequential trigger nail guns. Full sequential trigger nail guns are the safest. They will only fire a nail when the controls are activated in a certain order. First, the safety contact tip must be pushed into the work piece, then the user squeezes the trigger to discharge a nail. Both the safety contact tip and the trigger must be released and activated again to fire a second nail. It reduces the risk of unintentional nail discharge and double fires'including injuries from bumping into co-workers.

Step #2: Establish nail gun work procedures. Develop nail gun work rules and procedures to address risk factors and make the work as safe as possible. Here are some rules you might want to include in yours:

1. Don't secure the trigger in the ON position.
2. Carry the tool by the handle only and never walk around with your finger on the trigger.
3. Never rest the gun against any part of your body or try to climb a ladder with the gun cradled against your body.
4. Never point a nail gun at others. Exercise extreme caution when using any air tool around other people. Watch for co-workers behind or underneath the nailing surface.
5. Position yourself'especially your free hand'out of the line of fire.
6. Make sure you're in a stable position before firing a nail gun. Don't overreach when using the gun.
7. Don't fire a nail gun unless the nose is firmly pressed against the item or surface to be nailed.
8. Avoid nailing into knots and metal, which can cause the nails to ricochet.
9. Disconnect the gun when leaving it unattended, performing maintenance, moving to another work area or clearing jams.

Step #3: Provide training. Both new and experienced workers need safety training to learn about the causes of nail gun injuries and specific steps to reduce them. Be sure that training is provided in a manner that workers can understand. (For example, use this comic book-style guide on nail gun safety from NIOSH.) Here's a list of topics for training:

- How nail guns work and how triggers differ
- Main causes of injuries, especially the differences among types of triggers
- Instructions provided in manufacturers' manuals and where the manual is kept
- Hands-on training with the actual nail guns to be used on the job
- What to do when a nail gun malfunctions
- Your nail gun rules and work procedures, PPE requirements, injury and near miss reporting, and first aid and medical treatment.

Step #4: Provide PPE. Safety footwear, which help protect workers' feet from nail gun injuries, are typically required by OHS law. In addition, employers should provide the following protective equipment for workers using nail guns:

- Hardhats
- High impact eye protection
- Hearing protection, such as earplugs or earmuffs.

Step #5: Encourage reporting and discussion of injuries and near misses. Studies show that many nail gun injuries go unreported. So ensure that your policies and

practices encourage reporting of nail gun injuries as well as near misses, such as nail gun misfires. Reporting helps ensure that workers get medical attention. It also helps you identify unrecognized safety risks that could lead to additional injuries if not addressed. Plus, injuries and near misses provide teachable moments that can help improve worker safety.

Step #6: Provide first aid and medical treatment. Workers should seek medical attention immediately after nail gun injuries, even for injuries that appear to be minimal. Studies suggest that 1 out of 4 nail gun hand injuries can involve some type of structural damage such as bone fracture. In addition, materials such as nail strip glue or plastic, or clothing can get embedded in the injury and lead to infection. Plus, barbs on the nail can cause secondary injury if the nail is removed incorrectly. So leave the nail in place and let medical professionals remove it.