

## SPOT THE SAFETY VIOLATION: Watch Where You Point that Thing!



What's wrong with how this worker is holding this nail gun? What could go wrong?



Nail guns are very useful power tools because they allow workers to nail together materials more quickly than they can manually using a traditional hammer. But nail guns are dangerous if they aren't used properly.

For instance, in this picture from the Health and Safety Executive in Great Britain, the worker is pointing the nail gun in the direction of his abdomen. If

the gun or board should slip, he could easily shoot himself in the stomach.

*Example:* A worker in Ohio was nailing together two wood planks. He was holding the nail gun at the wrong angle and, when he fired, the nail went through the planks and into his stomach. Fortunately, he only suffered minor injuries.

*Bottom line:* You should never point a nail gun in anyone's direction—including your own.

## **TAKE 6 STEPS TO PREVENT NAIL GUN INJURIES**

To ensure that your workers don't get injured 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.

**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:

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 and all body parts 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.