

Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 44 – Monday, October 26 – Friday, October 30, 2026

Hand and Finger Safety

Introduction -- Hand and Finger Safety: The Injuries That Happen in Seconds

Introduction for Leaders:

This week focuses on hand and finger safety -- one of the most common injury categories in manufacturing and industrial environments. Hands are involved in nearly every task on the floor, which means they are exposed to hazards nearly every moment of the shift. The good news is that most hand and finger injuries are preventable, and the team has more influence over that than any policy or piece of equipment does.

The goal this week is to build genuine awareness -- not just rules to follow, but a real understanding of when and why hands get hurt, what protection works for each task, and how awareness of hand placement becomes second nature over time. That awareness starts with this conversation.

How to Frame This Week:

- Lead with specifics. This topic connects directly to the real tasks your team does every day. Bring in examples from your own area wherever you can.
- Monday carries the weekly challenge. Check in mid-week on whether team members are pausing before tasks to check hand placement and use Friday for the report-back.
- Create room for near misses. Team members who have had a close call with their hands may not have reported it. This week is a good opportunity to bring those experiences forward without judgment.

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Monday: Why Hands Get Hurt

Hands and fingers are involved in almost every task on a manufacturing floor. They are also among the most frequently injured parts of the body. Understanding why these injuries happen is the first step to stopping them.

The most common causes of hand and finger injuries:

- **Moving and pinch points.** Conveyors, presses, rollers, and rotating parts create gaps where fingers and hands can be caught without warning. The motion is fast and the contact is instant.
- **Cutting and sharp edges.** Blades, metal burrs, sheet edges, and broken materials can cut deeply even at low speed. Many cuts happen during handling, not during the cutting operation itself.
- **Struck-by hazards.** Tools slip, materials shift, and objects fall. Hands holding or positioned near the work are frequently in the path of impact.
- **Repetitive strain.** Sustained gripping, twisting, or vibration over time leads to cumulative injuries that build quietly and become serious before team members realize what is happening.

Weekly Challenge:

This week, before you start each task, take five seconds to look at where your hands will be and what they could come into contact with. Notice it. That pause is the habit that prevents a lot of hand injuries.

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Tuesday: Glove Selection and When Gloves Are Not the Answer

Gloves are one of the most visible forms of hand protection, but the wrong glove can create as much risk as wearing none. Knowing which glove fits which task is a skill worth developing.

Matching the glove to the hazard:

- **Cut resistance.** Tasks involving sharp materials, sheet metal, or blades call for cut-resistant gloves rated for the specific cut level of that material. A standard work glove does not provide meaningful cut protection.
- **Chemical resistance.** When handling solvents, oils, or cleaning agents, the glove material matters. Latex, nitrile, and neoprene each protect against different substances. Check the Safety Data Sheet before choosing.
- **Heat and cold.** Insulated gloves protect against both extremes. A glove rated for heat will not protect against cold, and vice versa.
- **When gloves become a hazard.** Around rotating equipment, gloves can catch and pull a hand in before a team member can react. Drill presses, lathes, and similar machines require bare hands or a specific glove designed for that environment. Never wear loose or frayed gloves near rotating parts.

Real-world example:

At an automotive parts plant, a team member handling sheet metal blanks without cut-resistant gloves received a deep laceration on two fingers during a routine transfer. The cut required surgery and several weeks of recovery. The correct gloves were available on site but had not been issued for that task. After the incident, cut-resistant gloves were added to the standard PPE requirement for all sheet metal handling operations.

Discussion Questions:

Do you know which specific glove type is required for each task in your area, and is that information easy to find when you need it?

Have you ever been in a situation where wearing a glove felt less safe than not wearing one? What was the task, and how did you handle it?

If you were updating the glove requirements for your area, what is one change you would make based on what you see day to day?

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Wednesday: Guarding, Positioning, and the Zone of Danger

Machine guards and safety devices exist to keep hands out of dangerous zones. Knowing how to work with guarding, and what to do when it is missing or damaged, is something every team member on the floor needs to understand.

Key principles for hand and finger safety around equipment:

- **Guards are not optional.** A guard that has been removed, bypassed, or is missing should be reported immediately and the equipment should not be operated until the guard is restored. The guard is part of the machine, not an add-on.
- **Hand placement is a habit.** Know where your hands will be at every point of a task, including during loading, unloading, and adjustments. Keep hands clear of the point of operation whenever possible.
- **Use the tools provided.** Push sticks, feed tools, and positioning aids are designed to keep hands away from cutting or pressing zones. They are there for a reason and should be used every time.
- **Report damaged guarding.** A guard that is bent, cracked, or improperly installed does not provide full protection. Flag it before it becomes someone's injury.

Real-world example:

At a packaging facility, a team member reached into a sealing press to clear a jam without locking out the machine first. The press cycled and crushed two fingers. Investigators found that the anti-restart guard had been disabled weeks earlier after a maintenance issue and had not been restored. The injury was preventable at multiple points. Following the incident, a guarding audit was completed across all press equipment in the facility.

Discussion Questions:

Is there any equipment in your area where the guarding feels like it gets in the way of doing the job? How do you work around that, and is there a safer way?

If you noticed a guard was missing or damaged on a piece of equipment, what would you do, and what do you think most people would do?

What is one moment in your normal tasks where your hands are closest to a hazard, and what do you do to keep them safe during that moment?

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Thursday: Building Awareness That Becomes Automatic

Most experienced team members develop a kind of automatic hand awareness over time, a sense of where their hands are relative to hazards, even without consciously thinking about it. That awareness is not luck. It is a skill that can be learned and strengthened.

How hand and finger awareness develops:

- **Slowing down during unfamiliar tasks.** When a task is new or the setup has changed, the automatic awareness has not built yet. Taking a deliberate, slower approach gives time for conscious attention to do what the automatic sense has not learned yet.
- **Pre-task hand placement review.** Before starting, ask where your hands will be throughout the task, not just at the start. Identify the moments of highest exposure and think through each one.
- **Learning from near misses.** A hand that almost got caught is valuable information. Sharing that experience with the team, without judgment, helps everyone identify a hazard they may not have seen.
- **Recognizing fatigue as a risk factor.** Tired hands move slower and grip less reliably. Fatigue at the end of a shift is when a lot of hand injuries occur. Being aware of that pattern is part of staying safe.

Real-world example:

At a metal fabrication shop, a senior team member began mentoring new hires specifically on hand positioning during press work. She would walk through each step of the task and narrate where her hands were and why. New team members who went through that mentoring had a measurably lower rate of hand-related near misses in their first six months compared to those who had not. The informal mentoring was later built into the standard onboarding process for the department.

Discussion Questions:

Think about a task you do so often it feels automatic. When did you last slow down and consciously think about where your hands are during that task?

Have you ever had a near miss involving your hands? If you are comfortable sharing, what happened and what did you take away from it?

What is one thing you do, or have seen someone else do, to protect their hands that you think more people should know about?

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Friday: Wrap-Up and Report-Back

Hands do the work. They also take the most risks. This week was about understanding how hand and finger injuries happen, choosing the right protection, respecting guarding, and building the kind of awareness that becomes second nature over time.

Key takeaways from this week:

- Most hand injuries happen fast, in seconds, and often during routine tasks that do not feel dangerous.
- The right glove for the right hazard matters. The wrong glove, or a glove worn near rotating equipment, can make things worse.
- Guarding exists to protect the team. Missing or damaged guards should be reported and the equipment should not be used until they are restored.
- Awareness of hand position is a skill. It builds with practice and deliberate attention, especially during unfamiliar or changed tasks.

Report-Back:

How did the weekly challenge go? Did pausing before tasks to check hand placement feel different by the end of the week? Did anyone notice a hazard they might have missed before? Share what came up.

Discussion Questions:

What is the most useful thing you learned or were reminded of this week about protecting your hands on the job?

Did the five-second pause before tasks feel natural by the end of the week, or did it still feel like extra effort? What would make it easier to maintain?

Is there anything about hand safety in your specific area that you think the team should talk about that did not come up this week?