

# Hand Tool Safety

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When a hand tool is poorly maintained or used **incorrectly, it's a danger to everyone. To avoid** vicarious liability, employers need a formal policy on the safe use of hand tools.

## Introduction

Many tasks cannot be completed without the use of hand tools. However, simple hand tools can cause serious injuries through misuse or poor maintenance.

*Note: This Loss Prevention Standard is restricted to hand tools. Power tools using electrical, pneumatic, hydraulic power, those powered by liquid fuel such as petrol and cartridge operated tools are excluded.*



## Responsibilities

The safe use of hand tools is the responsibility of both the employer, who should supply safe tools, and the employee who should use them safely. The maintenance of the tools is a shared responsibility.

In some trades it is commonplace for employees to supply their own hand tools, or to make special tools for certain tasks, but that does not change these responsibilities.

**If an employee's tools or equipment were to cause injury to another employee**, it is likely that the employer will be held responsible due to vicarious liability. Therefore, all employers should introduce procedures and policies to ensure all tools are used safely and kept in good condition to reduce the risk of accidents.

## Employee's Tools

Employees may have a range of tools including:

- Hand tools - simple hand tools such as hammers and chisels, spanners, wrenches
- Special purpose tools - tools that have a specific and unique function, such as tools issued by (or purchased from) equipment suppliers for work on their machinery or equipment
- Homemade specials - special purpose tools made by employees in order to carry out specific tasks or jobs

**An employee's tools could cause injury to another employee through:**

- Failure to select the appropriate tool for the job
- Lack of training in the safe use of tools
- The deliberate use of the wrong tool
- Failure to properly maintain a tool

## Vicarious Liability

Vicarious liability is a legal term used when one person is held responsible for the acts and omissions of another. An employer is generally regarded as being vicariously liable for the negligent acts or omissions of their employees.

An employer may be held liable for the actions or omissions of their employees in the course of their employment. To avoid vicarious liability, an employer must demonstrate that the employee was not negligent, in that the employee was reasonably careful, or that the employee was acting in his own right rather than on the employer's business.

## Safe Use of Tools

The safe use of tools depends on a number of features, including:

### Selection

Safe use of tools often depends on the selection of the correct tool for the job. For example, a screwdriver is designed for driving screws into timber and is not intended for levering or prying. Some circumstances require the use of special tools, e.g. non-sparking, or non-magnetic tools.

### Proper Use

Failure to follow **a tool's correct method of use will increase the risk of injury**. For example, driving nails should be done with a hammer and not a spanner. Proper use may extend to include the use of suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) when tools are used, such as wearing eye protection when hammering metal chisels, pins, masonry nails, etc.

### Inspection

All tools must be subject to regular inspection. Anyone using tools should ideally inspect them before each occasion of use, although tools in routine use could be inspected at the start of each working day. Any obvious faults or damage should be identified and fixed quickly.

Employees should carry out inspections regularly and routinely. However, it is advisable for employers to carry out formal inspections, say, weekly or monthly. The frequency should be established by means of risk assessment, taking into account the nature of the tools that employees are expected to provide and the frequency of use. Employer-inspections should ideally be carried out by appropriate individuals such as shop floor supervisors.

### Maintenance

Some tools will require routine maintenance on a regular basis, for example:

- Cutting tools, such as wood chisels and saws need regular sharpening
- Cold chisels, drift pins and wedges must have mushroomed heads ground-off regularly
- Wooden handles on hammers should be free of cracks and splinters and should fit tightly in the hammer head
- Adjustable tools such as wrenches may need lubricating and adjusting
- When freeing tight or seized nuts and bolts, leverage should not be increased by using a length of pipe
- Where tools cannot be repaired, such as **spanners with 'sprung' jaws, they should be discarded and replaced**

### Training

Employers should consider what training might be necessary, such as posters warning of the dangers associated with poor tools, or 'tool-box talks'.

### Tool Policy

**It is essential that employers have in place a formal policy regarding employee's tools, clearly stating:**

- What tools employees are expected to provide at their own cost
- What tools are supplied by the employer
- The standards that are in place, such as minimum standards regarding the type and quality of tools that are permitted or any **prohibition on 'homemade specials'**
- **Rules and procedures regarding the purchase of employee's tools, e.g. assisted purchase schemes**
- **Employee's responsibility for inspection, maintenance, and repair of all tools – not just those they have supplied**
- **Employer's procedures for inspection**

## Case Study

A mechanic at a garage was using his own hammer and chisel to free a bearing from an axle. The task was difficult, causing him to swear, so a supervisor walked over to see what the problem was. However, he was not fully aware of the task the employee was undertaking and so did not realise that he should be wearing safety glasses. As he drew near, **a chip flew off the mushroomed head of the employee's chisel striking the supervisor in the eye.** Unfortunately, this injury caused permanent damage and the supervisor is now blind in one eye.

## Key Action Steps

Employers should implement the following procedures:

1. Clear policy – **have a clear policy regarding employee's tools**
2. Tool supply – consider a policy of tool supply or assistance with the purchase of tools, to ensure suitable tools are purchased
3. Inspections – **carry out inspections of employee's tools**
4. Records – keep written records of such inspections

## Checklist

A generic Hand Tool Safety Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

## Specialist Partner Solutions

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[Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners](#)

## Sources and Useful Links

- [Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations: Safe Use of Work Equipment – Approved Code of Practice and Guidance: L22](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [Providing and Using Work Equipment Safely – A Brief Guide: INDG291](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [Using Work Equipment Safely: INDG229](#) – Health and Safety Executive

## Additional Information

Relevant Loss Prevention Standards include:

- Angle Grinders

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or speak to one of our advisors.

Email us at [riskadvice@aviva.com](mailto:riskadvice@aviva.com) or call 0345 366 6666.\*

\*Calls may be recorded and/or monitored for our joint protection.

# Appendix 1 – Hand Tool Safety Checklist



Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Tool Policy	Y/N	Comments
1.	Do you have a clear policy regarding employees' tools?		
2.	Have you considered a policy of tool supply or assistance with the purchase of tools, to ensure suitable tools are selected?		
3.	Have you considered what employee training is necessary?		

	Inspection and Maintenance	Y/N	Comments
4.	Do you have a programme of regular and formal inspections?		
5.	Do you routinely maintain tools?		
6.	Do you keep records of formal inspections and routine maintenance?		
7.	Additional comments:		

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