

TRENDS IN ... HAND PROTECTION

'Constantly re-evaluate your safety metrics'

By Tracy Haas, assistant editor

In 2013, 121,500 hand injuries resulted in days away from work, according to the 2016 edition of "Injury Facts," a National Safety Council chartbook. If that number gives you pause, read on as hand protection industry insiders offer advice on preventing hand injuries and describe what's new regarding protection.

What's new

"Tremendous" innovations in yarn and fiber technologies have occurred over the past 10 years, notes Jill A. Clements, Kevlar technical sales leader in mechanical protection for Wilmington, DE-based DuPont. "Both steel wire and glass fiber have become standard in the industry to increase the cut resistance of materials without compromising the comfort or dexterity of the glove," Clements said. "Additionally, zonal and compression knitting capabilities are being used more often to help manage and mitigate hand fatigue and soft-tissue injuries."

Advancements have been made in yarns and textiles used for cold weather protection, as well. "Advances in infrared yarns and textiles that reflect body heat back into the skin, enhance blood circulation and regulate body temperature are creating breakthroughs in winter hand protection," said Brian Sheehy, director of product management for Port Jefferson Station, NY-based OccuNomix International LLC. Sheehy states that infrared yarns and textiles – not to be confused with hand warmers – can help hands stay up to 5° F warmer than traditional winter work gloves.

Problems

Although it's critically important that workers' hands are protected at all times, be

mindful of overprotecting your workers with technology they might not need.

"A well-intentioned employer may provide gloves with an ANSI Cut Level 4 rating for a job requiring ANSI Cut Level 2 protection," said Darryl Nazareth, senior vice president, operations and R&D, for Iselin, NJ-based Ansell. "If those gloves are thicker, they may not perform as well as the gloves better matched for the job. Eventually, the worker will be tempted to take them off – and that's when serious injuries can happen."

Also, be watchful for workers displaying feelings of invincibility because of their personal protective equipment, states Andy Olson, associate product director at St. Paul, MN-based Ergodyne. "Wearing a specific type of glove, especially those with enhanced features such as cut resistance, may lead workers to have a false sense of security," Olson said, adding that PPE should always be treated as the last line of defense. "Engineering controls, proper training and technique, and an overall culture of hand safety awareness should always be top of mind in any situation where a hand injury risk is present," he said.

Another common problem in hand protection? Confusion.

"Cut resistance gloves are often misused because the cut levels are often misunderstood," said Bob Kelsey, glove product manager at Memphis-based Radians. "Hopefully, the recent changes in the ANSI/ISEA 105 2016 and EN 388 European Glove Standards, including the addition of four cut levels (A1-A9 versus 1-5) and the global use of the Tomodynamometer (TDM) 100 machine, will help to better define the various cut levels and their intended use."

Getting it right

Perhaps no more important advice exists than this: Find the right glove.

"If workers have bulky gloves with limited dexterity, they are more likely to remove them to perform certain tasks, leaving them susceptible to risk of injury," said Chris Meadows, product manager for London-based D3O.

Regarding cost, Olson is blunt: "Don't skimp, because low-cost, poor-quality one-size-fits-all gloves will be taken off at every opportunity."

Another important point to consider is whether workers understand the hazards they face and why they need to wear specific hand protection. "Hand protection, like all PPE, is the last layer in the OSHA Hierarchy of Controls and is employed when engineering controls cannot eliminate the hazard, or work practices cannot be altered to remove the risk," said Loren Rivkin, executive vice president for Northbrook, IL-based Saf-T-Gard International Inc. "However, the worker needs to be aware of the PPE that is being used, as it can mean the difference between going home at the end of a shift and tragedy."

Ultimately, if your workers are still suffering hand injuries, they're wearing the wrong gloves, Clements said. "It is important to constantly re-evaluate your safety metrics and job tasks to make sure the correct hand protection has been chosen," she added.



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