



Tailgate Safety Talk

Information You Can Use to Prevent Accidents & Injuries

Utility knives are one of the most often used hand tools in industry today. If used improperly, they can cause lacerations and/or puncture injuries. There are many types of utility knives available for specific uses, including fixed-blade, retractable-blade, single-edge-razor and snap-blade knives.

Following these simple rules can prevent most utility knife injuries:

- Wear proper protective equipment. There are specially designed, reinforced (Kevlar) safety gloves and sleeves available from most safety supply houses that protect your hands and arms from lacerations;
- Inspect the knife thoroughly before using it. On fixed-blade and/or retractable knives, make sure the blades are properly and securely seated and free from nicks or chips. When you're finished, close the knife tightly and fasten it;
- Clear all obstructions from your work area before using the knife. Remove all clutter to give you a clear path to cut;
- Always keep your knife under control. Many accidents occur when the knife slips or the blade breaks. Make sure your work is adequately secure.

A sharp blade is safer than a dull blade. A dull blade requires greater force to do the work. The more force applied to the knife, the less control you have. This makes it a greater likelihood the blade will slip or break. A sharp blade also will reduce the number of strokes it will take to cut through the work piece, increasing efficiency and making the work easier.

Ways to properly and safely use a knife include:

- Use the knife while standing in a well-balanced position. Anytime you have to bend, twist or reach while using the knife, your control of that knife is reduced; Always pull the knife toward you when making a cut on a flat surface. The knife is less likely to slip because a pulling motion is stronger and easier to control.
- Make sure the path of the cut is clear and your other hand is well out of the way. If at all possible, secure your work with a clamp when using a straightedge to guide your cut. This will keep your free hand out of the way;
- When cutting thick material, make several passes with the knife, applying more downward pressure with each pass. This method allows more control over the knife;
- When cutting around electrical wires, outlets, etc., make sure to disconnect the power before making the cut. Most utility knives will conduct electricity;
- Never use a utility knife as a screwdriver, pry bar or chisel. The blade could break off and become a projectile. Always use the tool as intended.

Use the following method when changing fixed-blade knives or retractable-blade knives:

- If the knife requires a screwdriver to open, lay the knife on a flat surface and remove the screw. Never hold the knife in one hand when removing the screw;
- Spare blades may be stored in the handle. Use extreme caution when opening the knife;
- Carefully remove the used blade and dispose of it properly. If possible, wrap the used blade in heavy tape, folding the tape over the sharp edge and sealing it;
- Insert new blade, ensuring it is seated properly and securely;
- Replace the screw;
- Inspect the knife to make sure it is assembled properly and the blade is secure.

Users of this tailgate talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations.