



## Knife Safety

At some point, most of us have been exposed to safety rules concerning knives. It's an area that overlaps into many aspects of our lives. Many of us use knives at work, at home or while enjoying our favorite recreational activities. While the rules about knife safety you may have learned as a youth still apply, today's wide variety of knives and various industrial applications for their use require us to stay sharp. We must always keep our safety in mind while using industrial knives. Knives in their simplest form consist of a sharp cutting blade and a handle. These knives come in various sizes and are used in a variety of applications.

### TYPES OF INDUSTRIAL KNIVES

- A common variation of a fixed blade knives are those with retractable blades, such as the box cutter or utility knife.
- When two blades are joined at a pivot point, the leverage created at their handles allows us to cut a wide variety of material. We recognize this as a pair of scissors, sometimes called shears.
- Remember that the same leverage that allows us to cut through tough materials can quickly sever fingers as well.
- Blades can also be connected to a power source to aid in cutting. Fabric cutters and meat cutters are examples.
- There are countless types and styles of cutting devices. While each may have a different shape and function, they all have one thing in common: the ability to cause serious injury when used improperly or in a careless manner.

### IMPORTANCE OF A SHARP BLADE

- No matter what type of application you have or environment you are working in, keeping a sharp blade makes it easier to cut through material. This allows the worker to exert less effort and makes it easier to maintain good posture while keeping the blade under control.
- Depending on the type of knife you are using, there are various ways to maintain a sharp blade.

### UTILITY KNIFE BLADES

- The blade on some utility knives may be scored to allow the dull section to be snapped off and a sharp edge to take its place. When performing this function, always wear safety glasses because the blade may fly away with enough force to cause an eye injury.



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- Always use an assist device to snap the blade, such as a pair of pliers. Never use your hand or force the blade against a solid object.
- Other types of utility knives require a new blade to be installed and the worn one replaced. Before doing this, make sure you know how to replace the blade and have the correct replacement on hand.
- Remember, even a worn blade is sharp and must be handled carefully. Only hold the blades on the unsharpened side; never hold a blade by the sharp side.
- When disposing of a used blade, it must be disposed of in a safe manner. Don't just throw it in the trash, this places others at risk.
- The best place to dispose of a used blade is in a "sharps" container. These containers are designed to safely handle sharp objects.
- An alternative disposal method is to carefully wrap several layers of tape around the blade before placing it in a waste container.
- Be sure to check with your supervisor for the specific disposal requirements for your facility.
- After installing a new blade, reassemble the knife, making sure all the screws are properly tightened to ensure the knife won't break open or come apart during use.

#### SHARPENING & INSPECTING FIXED BLADE KNIVES

- Fixed blade knives must also be kept sharp and inspected for good working condition.
- Before using a knife, check for any signs of damage such as cracked or damaged handles. Make sure the connection between the blade and the handle is secure.
- Knives with loose blades, damaged handles or other defects must be removed from service.
- While it is important to keep the blade sharp, knives should only be sharpened by a person properly trained and authorized by the company.

#### KEEPING BODY PARTS AWAY FROM BLADE'S PATH OF TRAVEL

- Another safety tip for preventing injuries while using knives is to maintain an awareness of where your body parts are located relative to the path the blade will travel.
- We have all heard the advice to always cut away from our body. This works well for whittling a stick but is usually awkward in most industrial applications.
- In fact, when cutting on a flat surface, the most powerful and efficient cutting motion is towards your body.
- Cutting at a 90-degree angle to your body is also a safe, powerful stroke.
- Before beginning any cutting motion, make sure your free hand is out of the way. This may seem easy when performing simple, slow-paced cutting tasks like opening boxes, but when faced with a fast-paced repetitive task, it takes deliberate concentration and effort to avoid injury.



## CUT-RESISTANT GLOVES

- Due to the increase risk of injury in these types of applications, many facilities require the use of a cut-resistant glove on the non-cutting hand.
- Various types of cut-resistant gloves are available to provide protection from an inadvertent cut or loss of control.
- Many times, a cut-resistant glove is worn under some other type of glove.
- If you are required to wear a cut-resistant glove while performing your job, be sure to do so. It only takes a moment for a serious injury to occur.

## OTHER KNIFE SAFETY TIPS

- As users of industrial knives, we must make sure to avoid any moments of carelessness if we are to prevent injury.
- Never attempt to cut an object when either you or the object is unstable.
- Where possible, place objects on a flat, stable surface before cutting. When this is not possible, at least make sure you have a stable stance and have a clear path of blade travel before cutting.
- Never hold or carry a knife by the blade; any type of mishap could lead to an injury. This includes handing the knife to someone else while holding the blade.
- To prevent these types of situations, always return a knife with a fixed blade to its sheath, scabbard or designated storage area as soon as you are finished cutting.
- Simply following good housekeeping practices can prevent many knife injuries.
- Should you happen to drop a knife, never attempt to catch it. It's better to let it hit the floor than risk grabbing the blade.
- If you must travel while holding a fixed blade knife, keep the tip pointed down and walk carefully. Stay alert for coworkers who may be in your travel path.
- When using knives with retractable blades, always close the blade when finished or before handing it to another worker.
- Many types of knives have built-in safety features such as automatically retracting blades or special guards to provide additional protection. These devices are only as good as the person using the knife; they should never be defeated or removed.
- Any time you might save by taking a shortcut while using a knife is trivial compared to the extensive rehabilitation required by a serious hand laceration.