

Safe Work Procedures Can Prevent Deadly Nail Gun Injuries; Train Workers to Safely Handle This Powerful Equipment

Nail guns are used every day on many construction jobs. Although they boost productivity, nail guns also cause tens of thousands of painful injuries each year.

Background on Nail Guns

Why train workers in nail gun safety? Nail guns are responsible for an estimated 37,000 emergency room visits each year in the United States, and nail gun injuries can be fatal. In addition, workers tend to injure themselves multiple times with nail guns. A study of apprentice carpenters using nail guns found that 20 percent were injured twice, and 10 percent were injured three or more times.

Basics of Nail Gun Safety

Nail gun injuries can be painful, debilitating, and even deadly. Prevent nail gun injuries to yourself and your co-workers by observing these safe work practices:

- Always check your nail gun before operating. Take broken or malfunctioning nail guns out of service immediately.
- Check lumber surfaces for knots, nails, straps, hangers, etc., that could cause recoil or ricochet.
- For placement work, keep your hands at least 12 inches away from the nailing point at all times. Consider using clamps to brace instead of your hands.
- Always shoot nail guns away from your body and away from co-workers.
- Always disconnect the compressed air when:
 - leaving a nailer unattended
 - traveling up and down a ladder or stairs
 - passing the nail gun to a co-worker
 - clearing jammed nails
 - performing any other maintenance on the nail gun
- Use a hammer instead of a nail gun, or reposition your work, if:
 - You are nailing metal joinery or irregular lumber.
 - You cannot reach the work while holding the nailer with your dominant hand.
 - The work is at face or head height, where recoil is more difficult to control.
 - You are working in a tight space, where recoil is more difficult to control and double-fires are more common.

- Take extra care with toe-nailing, when the gun cannot be held flush against the work piece. Use a nail gun with teeth on the safety contact to bite into the work piece to keep the gun from slipping during the shot. Use the trigger to fire only after the safety contact piece is positioned.
- When using a nail gun at height:
 - Position ladders so you don't have to reach too far. Your belt buckle should stay between the side rails when reaching to the side.
 - Maintain three points of contact with the ladder at all times to prevent a fall. Use clamps for placement work if necessary.
- Never bypass or disable nail gun safety features.
- Keep your finger off the trigger when holding or carrying a nail gun.
- Never lower the nail gun from above or drag the tool by the hose.
- If the nail gun hose gets caught on something, don't pull on the hose. Go find the problem and release the hose.
- Never use the nailer with your non-dominant hand.

Conclusion

Nail gun injuries are preventable if workers know and observe safe work practices—and training has been shown to make a difference. Untrained workers suffer more injuries than workers who have been trained to nail down safety.