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Don't be a fool when it comes to tools

Workers should be trained before being assigned to operate powered machinery



A worker who was not trained was injured cutting protruding rebars at an air-conditioner ledge. (Above, right) A hand-held electric grinder. (Right) A worker showing how the left hand is kept at a safe distance from the cutting tool. PHOTOS: MOM



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Workers should never operate machinery or tools that they have not been trained in. Doing so will only put them and others around them at risk of workplace injuries.

In February 2015, a worker was assigned to cut off the protruding steel rebars of an air-con ledge located on the ninth storey of a factory building.

He was required to use a hand-held electric grinder for the cutting process. However, he had no experience with rebar cutting and was not trained to use the electric grinder.

During the one-man operation, he had difficulty cutting a rebar that was beside a barricade installed to prevent workers from falling off the building.

The worker placed his left hand on the barricade while operating the grinder with his right hand. When the grinder's spinning disc came into contact with a rebar, he lost control of it and severed his left thumb.

Prior to assigning work, employers need to ensure that workers are adequately trained and competent in machine operating and maintenance.

Mr Kenneth Loo, president of the Singapore Contractors Association Limited (Scal), said: "Scal urges all companies to ensure that their workers are properly trained to operate tools safely."

"It does not take a lot of effort, in fact, briefing and demonstrating to workers on how to safely

use hand-held tools takes less than an hour. Training can prevent life-changing injuries.

"Employers should also supervise workers using hand-held tools for the first time to ensure that they have understood the dangers of operating such tools."

TRAINING

Training helps workers to gain competency in the safety and health aspects of their work.

Training may include formal classroom training, on-the-job coaching, and instructions to individuals or groups.

All training details, such as the date of training, participant list and topics covered, should be properly documented.

EXPERIENCE

Employers have to ensure that workers gain adequate experience in operating machinery while under adequate supervision.

This will allow workers to put into practice the skills and knowledge that they have garnered from training.

SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

Employers also need to be aware of the specific workplace safety and health performance competencies that are required for different work designations.

Managers

They should be able to:

- Identify responsibilities under the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Act;

- Establish and maintain a WSH framework;
- Establish and evaluate WSH systems, policies, procedures and programmes;
- Establish workplace risk management procedures; and
- Manage workplace risk control measures.

Supervisors

They should be able to:

- Interpret WSH policies, procedures and programmes;
- Educate workers on WSH policies, procedures and programmes;
- Implement and control WSH management programmes;
- Implement workplace risk management programmes; and
- Maintain workplace risk control measures.

Employees

When employees are properly trained in WSH, they should be able to:

- Follow safe work procedures and risk control procedures;
- Participate in WSH management activities;
- Follow workplace emergency response procedures;
- Use equipment and personal protective equipment provided safely and properly; and
- Report accidents, incidents, diseases, near misses or any workplace hazards to the supervisor.

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SnapSAFE

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Under the Workplace Safety and Health Act, employers are required to manage risks at work, while employees must adhere to safe work practices. These include ensuring safety measures are taken for any machinery, equipment, article or process used at the workplace. Failure to do so can result in a fine of up to \$500,000 for the first offence.

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Spot unsafe activities around your neighbourhood? Want to let the Manpower Ministry know about an unsafe practice at your workplace? Snap the photos on your mobile phone and send them to the SnapSAFE app. All contributions are secret.