THE SAFE USE OF HAMMERS

The most common "tool rule" for preventing accidents is: "use the right tool for the job". This rule is often violated when it comes to hammers because it is easy to use a hammer in the wrong way.

Two of the most widely used hammers are the ball peen and the claw or nail hammer. Each are made in different sizes and weights. Nail hammers are made in two patterns; curved claws and straight or ripping claws. The curved claws are for pulling nails, the straight claws are for pulling nails and for prying or ripping. These claws are not for striking and will likely break off if used that way.

Some claw hammers will have checkered faces designed to reduce the chance of flying nails and glancing blows, but the most common head has a slightly crowned face with beveled edges. It is tempered and should be used only to drive common nails. These hammers should never be used to drive hardened masonry nails or other tempered steel fasteners. Striking a hardened material with a claw hammer may cause chips to break off its head.

Ball peen hammers have rounded, slightly crowned striking faces with beveled edges, plus a ball shaped peen at the other end. As with nail hammers, ball peen hammers are made in several weights and are used for striking chisels and punches, for riveting, and shaping, etc. A ball peen hammer should have a striking face that is at least 3/8 in. larger in diameter than the tool it strikes.

The safe use of hammers involves certain basic rules:

- Safety glasses are absolutely necessary when using any striking tools. If your eye is hit with even a small fragment such as a flying wood chip or metal fragment - it could cause serious and lasting damage.
- Use hammers and striking tools only for the purposes for which they were designed.
- High quality striking tools are always preferred and usually safer. A well-made hammer looks good and has a solid feel in your hand.
- Always grip the hammer near the end of the handle so you have the full length of the handle to provide maximum force to the blow.
- A hammer handle should always be swung so the face contacts the surface you are hitting squarely. You should never strike from an angle.
- When using a hammer to strike another metal tool, such as a punch or chisel, aim the blow or cut away from your body. The tool being struck must be in perfect condition. This means a punch should never have a mushrooming head, or the handle on a wood chisel should not be cracked.
- Only the face of the hammer should be used for striking. Never strike with the side or cheek of a hammer; these areas are simply not designed or tempered for striking.
- A procedure for the safety inspection of all hand tools should be in place to check them for defects on a regular basis.
- If a hammer shows dents, cracks, chips, mushrooming or excessive wear, do not try to re-grind it to shape. It is worn out and dangerous - discard it! Discard any hammer that exhibits even the slightest hairline fracture.
- If the handle on a hammer is loose, splintered, or cracked, the head may fly off and strike the user or another person. Hammers with broken or split handles, should be repaired or discarded.
- Wooden handles that are worn, cracked or damaged in any way should be replaced with new ones of equal size and type. Replace or tighten loose handles with the proper wedges, and never use nails or staples for wedges.
- If a steel or fiberglass handle is loose, it is more difficult to repair than a wooden one. Some fiberglass handles can be tightened with the aid of a repair kit with epoxy materials, as can metal handles.
- Remember that broken, worn out, bent or damaged tools are not only unproductive and frustrating to work with, but if repeatedly used, they will almost certainly lead to an accident or injury.

And when it comes to the safe use of striking tools, use your safety glasses.