Hand Laceration

Prepared by Ron Fouty

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INCIDENT ALERT

A worker was tasked with loading a hot tar pumping kettle with cold roofing tar. The tar had been delivered in large, 100 pound "kegs" wrapped in heavy paper. The process is to cut the paper, unwrap the tar, cut the tar into manageable pieces and then load the tar into the kettle. The worker was using a hook bladed utility knife for the process. As he was cutting one of the paper wrappers, the tip of the blade broke remaining part of the blade struck his left hand. The broken knife blade imbedded in his glove and the momentum of the cutting motion caused it to lacerate his palm. He was transported to a nearby emergency room where he received 11 stitches and was released to return to restricted duty.

LESSONS LEARNED

During the incident investigation, several issues were discussed. First, this was the first time the worker had used a hook blade for the task he was performing. Selection of different equipment in accomplishing any task requires that you allow yourself some "training time" to get used to the new equipment. Second, the glove he was using, though substantial under most situations, may not have been the best for the task. Something more cut or puncture resistant may have been a better choice, such as a heavy pair of leather gloves. Third, the worker stated he was rushing to get the material prepared for the work and felt he should have worked more slowly. Fourth, the worker's hand was near the area he was cutting, potentially exposing him to the possibility of injury.

This incident seems to clarify the need for effective task planning. An effective plan includes looking into the work to be performed, identifying what, while performing the task, could hurt you, and taking preventative measures to eliminate the potential for injury. The need to take the time to work safely could have been addressed, the selection of appropriate personal protective gear could have been discussed, the new cutting tool could have been discussed, and the method of holding the tar kegs to prevent the need to cut in the proximity of the workers hand could have been addressed. There were many opportunities to avoid this injury.

Worker input is critical in selecting appropriate personal protective equipment. After all, who would know what the hazards of the work are better than the person performing the job? Their input can help companies in their logistical efforts in completing the job safely and economically. The false economy of selecting less effective personal protective equipment can end up costing a company thousands of dollars in injury claims.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Talk with your contractors about their task planning expectations. Ask how they oversee the task planning efforts of their subcontractors. Talk with them specifically about the hazards of roofing operations and how they work to prevent roofing related injuries.
2. Watch for these types of activities at your projects. How are roofing contractors loading and handling tar kegs? Do similar types of exposures exist on your job? Are the contractors selecting and using the appropriate PPE?
3. Share this information with your contractors and encourage them to talk about it with their workers.

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