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INCIDENT ALERT

An apprentice sheet metal worker was in the process of installing sealing strips on stainless steel square duct. The installation process requires positioning the strip and then bending the edges at a 90 degree angle in order to close the duct. The apprentice had been instructed to use a 2 foot long piece of 2” angle iron as a tool. He was instructed to place the angle iron on the lip to be bent and strike one end of the angle iron with a hammer while keeping his hand on the other. At some point in the process, the apprentice changed the work practice to placing the angle iron on the lip and striking along the length of it. This resulted in the hammer coming close to his off hand. While striking along the angle iron he missed with the hammer and struck the tip of his index finger, breaking it. He was transported to a nearby medical facility where his finger was splinted and he was allowed to return to work.

LESSONS LEARNED

The apprentice had been performing the task for several days. He had been working on the project for approximately one week, and had only been an apprentice for approximately one month. The journeyman he had been assigned to work with had covered the job hazard analysis with him before assigning the task, had assessed the tools to use, and instructed the worker in the proper technique. The journeyman had observed the apprentice working and following the described procedure then went on to other tasks. He had not been nearby to correct the change in procedure and to instruct the apprentice about hammering in close proximity to his finger.

Though a job hazard analysis had been completed and reviewed, the practice of daily task planning could have been extremely helpful in this situation. Work practices would have been reviewed at the beginning of shift each day, and a discussion between the foreman and apprentice could have taken place around modifying the process. Daily assessment of proper tool use could also have taken place, and the need for daily planning and “engaging the brain” would have been highlighted.

It is important for us all to remember that modifying procedure, changes in process, and changes in the tools being used can all pose additional hazards. Those hazards must be thought through thoroughly and methods of eliminating the hazards developed by all people involved in the task. More thorough planning and observation of the work process could have helped prevent this injury.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Ask your contractor about their expectations for hand tool use. Ask about how apprentices and new workers are supervised and brought in to the safety culture of the project and how new employees are engaged in the task planning and job hazard analysis process.
2. Watch for tasks that may result in similar injuries during your walk through. Are people using hand tools positioning their off hand away from the work? Could the loss of tool control result in an injury, either to the worker or others nearby?

3. Share this Incident Alert with your contractor and ask them to share it with their workers.

Distribution:
All CPO Staff