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INCIDENT ALERT

A sheetrock worker was tasked with installing metal corners on a new ceiling section. The location was above a staircase and at the juncture of a wall that extended up from the ceiling to the next floor. The metal corner was designed so a section of it slipped between the wall and the ceiling, and when the worker was attempting to fit the piece he found he needed to trim away a portion of the ceiling material. He decided to use a utility knife for the operation. The knife had been well used and had become dull. The worker placed his left hand on the corner to steady himself and inserted the knife blade, then began drawing the blade toward his hand. The blade slipped from position and cut his thumb, which had been placed in the direct path of the cut. He reported the injury to his supervisor who transported him to a nearby medical facility where he received stitches and was released to return to work.

LESSONS LEARNED

Three primary factors were identified during the incident investigation. First, the company the worker was employed by has a policy that requires the use of cut resistant gloves when using knives. The worker was not wearing gloves at the time. Second, the knife he was using was dull, making it’s use more difficult and requiring more force to perform the operation. Had he been using a sharp blade it may not have slipped and struck his hand. Third, and probably most significant, the worker was cutting toward his body. It is imperative that when using any type of hand tool we all make sure our body parts are not in the direct path of the tool.

Utility knives are commonly found on construction projects. In some situations, they are even the best tool for the job! Please keep in mind that there may be alternative tools that are more safely used for the job that may not have exposed sharp edges. Knives are some of the oldest tools developed by mankind, and it is important that we keep their inherent dangers in mind.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Talk with your contractor about the use of utility knives on your project. Ask what types of precautions are required and how those requirements are enforced.

2. Watch for tasks that may result in similar injuries during your walk through. Are workers using knives? What kind of gloves are they wearing? What precautions have been taken to assure they will not expose themselves or other workers to a potential injury?

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

Distribution:  All CPO Staff

REV. (DATE)