

Hand Tools: Condition, Selection & Line of Fire

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Why this matters

A simple tool can release force suddenly when it slips, breaks or cuts through material. Before starting, check the tool, support the work and identify where a hand or body could be struck.

Objective: Choose a suitable tool and verify a work position that keeps people out of its path.

Key hazards or failure points

Loose or damaged handles; worn jaws; damaged striking heads; exposed blades; unsupported work; excessive force; and another person within the strike or cutting path.

Practical controls

- Use a tool designed for the job. Follow its instructions and the task plan. Change the method when access or force makes the selected tool unsuitable; do not improvise extensions or substitutes.
- Inspect before use and remove unsafe tools from service. Have repairs handled through the approved process. Do not keep a damaged tool available for someone else to pick up.
- Support the work with a suitable holding method. Position hands, body and other people clear of the expected movement and the path if the tool slips. Use the task's specified eye, face and hand protection.

Verify It in the Field

- Identify the tool and check its condition against the applicable requirements. Check handles, jaws, heads, edges and any guards or locks. Do not strike a damaged tool to see whether it will hold.
- Before applying force, confirm the work support and available clearance. Describe the intended motion and where the tool or material could go if it releases unexpectedly. Reposition people or change the setup where needed.
- For a cutting task, confirm the appropriate cutting tool, support, exposed-blade control and storage method under its instructions. Verify the PPE fits and does not interfere with handling. Make this check before exposing hands to the cutting path.

Stop and reassess

Stop for slipping, unexpected movement, a loose head, damage, poor access or a task requiring more force than the method safely allows. Put the tool in a safe condition, secure the work and remove defective equipment. Correct the method, verify the replacement setup and rebrief affected workers before resuming.

Ask the crew

- Where will the tool or material go if it slips or releases?
- What makes this tool and holding method suitable for the job?
- What defect or difficulty tells us to stop rather than apply more force?

Check the tool—and the path of the force.

Next step: Record today's changes and checks on the free JSA Planning and Field-Verification Sheet. Supervisor check and attendance are separate.

[Free JSA planning sheet](#)

References: OSHA 1926.301; CCOHS hand-tool and sharp-blade guidance. Expanded explanation and references accompany the web version.