
Nail gun injuries are avoidable

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Purpose

There have been several incidents where nail gun operators and other persons have been injured by a nail being fired into their body, the most recent being when a person knocked into a gun set in 'bump-fire' mode. The injury occurred as the worker using the gun, was changing position while working in a restricted space. The trigger remained depressed and the nail fired when he knocked into the contact tip.

This Alert warns employers, operators and other workers about the dangers of using nail guns and provides basic advice on the control of risks.

Background

Nail guns are available in different sizes and configurations depending on the application; they are generally powered by gas canisters or compressed air via a hose. The two most common configurations are straight magazine feed and coil magazine nailers. Applications include framing, flooring, roofing, for fixing eaves, trusses, joists, decking, cladding, and for use in manufacturing processes such as cabinet making and pallet making.



Figure 1 – Coil Nailer



Figure 2 – Magazine Type Framing Nail Gun

To fire a nail, two actions are required. Not only does the gun's trigger need to be pressed, the safety switch built into the gun contact tip also has to be activated by pushing against a solid object.

Many nail guns have two operating mode settings; either single shot or 'bump-fire'. The method of changing operating mode varies depending on the type of nail gun, and reference should be made to the manufacturer's instructions on how to alter these settings.

Single shot mode

In single shot mode, the trigger is pulled, the safety switch depressed and the nail is fired. If the finger is kept on the trigger after the nail has fired and the safety switch is depressed for the second time, the gun will not operate. Therefore, after each nail is fired, the trigger needs to be released.

'Bump-fire' mode

In 'bump-fire' mode, the trigger remains depressed and each time the gun's contact tip is depressed, a nail will fire. This setting saves time and avoids the repeated pulling of the trigger for the operator when undertaking work such as nailing decks or fencing.

On the 'bump-fire' setting, a finger is kept on the trigger and the safety mechanism depressed onto the solid object before it fires. This is repeated in quick succession.

WorkSafe expects

Employers must have safe systems of work for the use of nail guns, which include:

- regular inspection of the gun and associated equipment
- maintaining the gun and associated equipment in a safe and serviceable condition
- following manufacturer's specifications and operating instructions for the particular nail gun
- only using fasteners recommended by the nail gun manufacturer
- ensuring operators, including contractors, are trained in the safe use of the particular gun and understand the manufacturer's instructions for operation
- ensuring operators have, and wear appropriate hearing and eye protection when using the gun
- ensuring the 'bump-fire' mode of the nail gun should not to be used:
 - in restricted space areas where stooping or awkward postures are necessary to gain access, or
 - in areas where other workers are in close proximity of the operator

Employers also need to monitor the use of the nail guns to ensure that the safe systems of work are being maintained by the operators.

Further Information

The material has been prepared using the best information available to WorkSafe Victoria. Any information about legislative obligations or responsibilities included in this material is only applicable to the circumstances described in this material. You should always check the legislation referred to in this material to ensure that you have complied with the law. Accordingly WorkSafe Victoria extends no warranties as to the suitability of the information for your specific circumstances.

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