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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FARM SHOP SAFETY

Don't overlook the hazards of hand and portable power tools.

Since we use them so frequently, it may be easy to lose sight of the hazards that hand and portable power tools pose when working in a farm shop.

LaMar Grafft, retired Associate Director of the North Carolina Agromedicine Institute, says making sure the right tool has been selected for the job at hand is a key part of safely using hand tools.

"It's not uncommon to see someone using a punch for a pry bar, a screwdriver for a chisel, a wrench for a hammer," Grafft says. "It's important to take time to grab the right tool. Trying to make the wrong tools work could end up badly."

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), those hazards include falling, flying, abrasive, and splashing objects. Users may also be exposed to harmful dusts, fumes, mists, vapors or gases as they operate these tools. Anyone operating a hand tool should be informed and/or trained in how to use it in a safe manner.

Hand tools that are powered manually include anything from axes to wrenches. As Grafft noted, the greatest dangers of using these tools is using the wrong tool for the job or neglecting maintenance of the tool.

If a wooden handle on an axe or hammer is loose, splintered or cracked, the head of the tool may fly off, striking the user or bystanders. If the jaws of a wrench are sprung, the wrench could slip. Depending on how it's being used, a serious injury could occur. Using impact tools such as chisels or wedges risk the potential for the head of the tool to shatter, resulting in sharp fragments flying toward the user or anyone nearby.

If employees are working in the shop, employers should keep in mind that they are responsible for keeping tools in good condition and training workers on safe use of the tools.

Anytime saw blades, knives, or other sharp tools are utilized, direct the tool away from any aisle and away from anyone else who's nearby. Knives and scissors should be sharpened regularly since dull tools cause more injuries than sharp ones. Anytime a tool is cracked or damaged, it should be repaired or replaced.

If a wrench is damaged to the point where it no longer provides a secure grip, it should be replaced. Any wedges or chisels should be disposed of if they develop mushroomed heads.

To help prevent tool injuries around the farm shop, maintain all tools in good condition through regular maintenance. Always use the right tool for the job. Before using a hand tool, inspect it for any damage. If it is in disrepair, remove it from use. Always operate power tools according to the manufacturers' instructions.

Grafft notes that using the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is equally important.

"Anytime you're grinding something, you need goggles for proper eye protection," Grafft says. "If the tool you're using is loud, hearing protection is necessary. If you have others – employees or family

– working in the shop, make sure the necessary PPE is available.

“If youth are working with you, keep in mind that you’re giving them the wrong idea by not using tools and PPE in a safe manner,” Grafft says. “We want to avoid setting a bad example that causes them to develop unsafe work habits.”

Keeping workplace floors clean and clear of clutter significantly reduces potential for unforeseen slips, trips, or falls in the shop. If any material – dry or wet – is spilled on the floor, it should be immediately cleaned up. To avoid spilling hazardous liquids or other material on the floor, store them well away from the work area.

Iron or steel hand tools may produce sparks that can be an ignition source around flammable substances. Wherever this hazard exists, spark-resistant tools made of non-ferrous materials should be used if flammable gases, highly volatile liquids, and other explosive substances are stored or used.

Power tools should be fitted with guards and safety switches because they are extremely hazardous if they’re used improperly. General precautions that apply to using power tools include:

- Never carry a tool by the cord or hose.
- To disconnect a power cord or a hose, follow manufacturers’ instructions.
- Keep cords and hoses away from heat, oil, and sharp edges.
- Disconnect tools when they’re not in use.
- Before cleaning or servicing a power tool, or changing accessories such as blades, bits, and cutters, ensure that it’s disconnected from a power source.
- Secure work with clamps or a vise, freeing both hands to operate the tool.
- To avoid accidentally starting a power tool connected to a power source, don’t hold fingers on the switch button while holding it.
- Maintain good footing in the work area to ensure good balance when using the tool.

- ❑ Avoid wearing loose clothing, ties, or jewelry, which can potentially be entangled in moving parts. Keep long hair away from the tool while it's running.
- ❑ Keep all persons who aren't involved in the work away from the work area.
- ❑ Keep tools clean and sharp for optimum performance.
- ❑ Remove all damaged portable electric tools from use and tag them with "Do Not Use."

"Injuries resulting from the use of hand tools are usually small, maybe a smashed finger from using a hammer or cut while using a box cutter," Grafft says. "They're not life-threatening, but taking precautions to avoid them is the best practice."

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