

THE RISK OBSERVER

TABLE SAW SAFETY

Ripping wood on a table saw has produced many lost and severely lacerated fingers. Based on the claims we have received from schools, this operation would appear to be the most dangerous and least understood by students. You are urged to review this operation with your staff and have them in turn, review it again with your students.

PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID INJURIES

- Use push sticks.
- Keep the guard in place.
- Use the fence correctly.
- Keep the hands away from the blade when the cut is completed, but the wood that is against the fence is not clear of the rotating blade.
- Adjust the blade to the appropriate height.

Blade guards are essential to avoid a claim of negligence when someone is injured using the table saw. Guards, at the very least, provide a warning of the danger of the blade. The absence of guards is often noted after injury occurs.

In addition, you should consider the use of a device that can be attached to the fence, which helps to hold down the stock being ripped and to hold it against the fence. These provide additional control of the wood being ripped, by preventing kick backs and keeping the wood properly aligned against the fence.

Remember, example is a powerful teacher. If you or other adults use the saw without a guard or the use of a push stick, your students will quite naturally assume they are of little or no value. You are the professional; set the example!

PROCEDURES FOLLOWING AN INJURY

Be prepared to quickly and effectively deal with accidental injuries by:

1. Shutting down the shop power equipment with the emergency switches, which should be quickly and easily accessible.



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2. Stop all class activity and see that the injured person receives immediate care by a qualified person, and is taken to the appropriate place for medical treatment as soon as possible.
3. Review the circumstances of the accident as soon as possible and commit your findings to writing. Even a few days delay will erase details from your memory. Be as accurate as possible in your description of what happened. The people whose job it is to defend the district against a liability claim should not be surprised at a later date by omissions or inaccuracies which compromise the defense position. All details may be relevant. Obtain credible witnesses as soon as possible.
4. Review your lesson plans and documentation to determine that the injured student was, in fact, taught the safety rules and, based on testing, knew and understood these rules.
5. Review all machinery operational status to be sure you can document the fact that the particular machine involved was in safe working order with all guards in place. You should do this routinely before an accident happens. You should also document your inspections and immediately remove unsafe equipment from use until it is repaired and safe again, even if it means adjusting your lesson plans or the progress of a student's project by doing so.
6. Cooperate with your district insurance carrier representative, and be sure that is whom you are talking with. Plaintiff's attorneys employ investigators who will say they are from the "insurance company". Their job is to obtain damaging statements from you or others in the school.
7. Follow-up with the injured student and his or her parents to be sure they understand your concern and that your primary interest is the return of the student to school to continue his or her education. This, however, is not the time to discuss how the accident happened or your responsibility, if any, for it. Parents will appreciate your concern and it will help to create the impression that you and your school care for the individual pupil.
8. Review all your safety procedures and practices and reinforce them with your staff and students. Most importantly, review your supervision procedures. An alleged lack of supervision is one of the more common ways that claimant attorneys attempt to establish liability. While you can't be at all of the pupil stations at once, you can avoid external distractions such as visits by other staff members, phone calls and similar ways that your attention can be taken from the task at hand. Good supervision of your pupils is the key to a safe program and should never be compromised. If a distraction is necessary, be sure your pupils stop work while you attend to it and then resume only when you can give them your undivided attention.
9. Finally, create and maintain a file, including all of the documents you have collected or created as a result of the injury.



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