WORKING SAFELY WITH POWDER ACTUATED TOOLS

Those of you who have used a powder actuated tool know how much easier it makes your work. But these tools are as dangerous as loaded guns. That is why you must be specially trained and certified to use them.

A powder actuated tool uses a powder charge the way a gun shoots a bullet. It "shoots" a fastener, or stud, into a surface, such as concrete or steel. Like bullets, studs improperly shot can injure or kill workers. All powder actuated tools are equipped with special guards and muzzle fittings to keep you from getting hurt by a ricocheting stud or chips of flying masonry. The tool will not fire without such guards. Let's talk about how to safely use these powerful tools.

First, treat the tool exactly like a loaded gun. Never point it at anyone, put your hand over the muzzle, or drop it. Second, always unload the tool to transport or store it. The same goes for moving from job to job. Keep the tool unloaded until you are ready to drive a stud. Third, like a gun, a powder-actuated tool has a kick. Brace yourself when using it, especially on ladders or scaffolds.

The power loads for powder actuated tools are essentially blank cartridges. They are color and number coded for power level. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions to select the right power load for the material you're firing into. Before loading, check that the chamber is clean.

When you use a powder actuated tool, always wear eye protection, and wear hearing protection if you work in an enclosed area. Before beginning, test drive a fastener with a hammer, to double check that the surface is really the concrete or steel surface you think it is. Studs accidentally fired into wood, sheet rock, or lath and plaster will go through the wall and out the other side with the force of a bullet. To be on the safe side," make sure no one is working on the other side of the wall. And if you want to live long, avoid firing into brittle materials such as glass bricks, tile, cracked concrete, or stone, which are likely to shatter.

To drive a stud, press the tool firmly against the surface at right angles. Fire studs well away from the edge of the surface or any holes at least one-half inch for steel and 3 inches for concrete. And remember, powder actuated tools must not be used near explosives or flammable. To fasten close to an obstacle, adjust the guard so that the barrel is close to the guard edge. Use this feature only when absolutely necessary. The guard is there to protect you. If the tool misfires, keep holding it firmly against the surface for 30 seconds. Then dispose of the power load according to the manufacturer's directions.

Clean and maintain your tool according to instructions and use only factory replacement parts. When using this powerful, dangerous tool, take the time to be sure of what you're doing. It's already saving you lots of time and energy you don't need to save more time by cutting corners on safety.

OSHA requires employee certification for each employee using powder actuated tools. Employees must be certified and have, in their possession, a certificate indicating they have been trained for the particular model tool they are using.