



How the job is usually done

We use our hands and fingers for almost everything we do, yet we seldom think about what effect the tasks we perform might be having on them. When using hand tools in forestry work, both the design of the tool you use and the size of the glove you wear are very important.

Ergonomic concerns

Because a lot of hand tools cause the wrist to be bent, a great deal of stress is placed on the tendons, nerves and blood vessels. You need to be cautious about using the palm of your hand as a tool, or using a tool that constantly presses into the palm of your hand. This can cause soft tissue damage which can result in bruising, numbness and/or tingling in your fingers.

Many workers still don't wear gloves. This may be because they don't fully understand the importance of hand and arm protection, or because the gloves are uncomfortable when working. If gloves are uncomfortable to wear, it's usually because they don't fit properly. Poorly fitting gloves increase the amount of force required from the muscles because they have to work harder to compensate for poor fit. Tight-fitting gloves can cause pressure on the hands, limit your dexterity and increase perspiration, leading to fatigue and related injuries. Loose-fitting gloves reduce your grip strength, impair your dexterity and productivity and can create other safety hazards, such as if they get caught in machinery.

Recommended adjustments

Whenever possible, you should use a power grip rather than a pinch grip. Power grips allow greater force to be exerted with the least strain on your hand, wrist and forearm muscles. Whenever possible, you should hold the tool with both hands – one to control the movement and one for support. This will reduce the amount of force required and reduce fatigue of the muscles. Rubber handles are generally more comfortable than metal handles. Ideally there should be no indentations in your hand when using a hand tool. If gloves are worn, the handle size of the hand tool should increase to accommodate the larger palm size. Tool handles with indentations should be avoided because hand sizes vary from person to person and not everyone's fingers will fit in the indentations.

It is important to report any early symptoms of sprain or strain injuries as with early detection can result in a solution to the problem before it gets worse.

For additional information:

To learn more about hand tools and gloves (including the benefits of proper fitting gloves), what type of questions to ask when purchasing gloves and how the proper size of glove, please see the Fall/Winter 2007 issue of The Log available on the OFSWA website.

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