



Safety & Risk Office 5-Minute Safety Talk No. 8 – Utility Knife Safety

Note to Supervisor: This 5-Minute Safety Talk (in some places, it might be called a Toolbox Talk or a Tailgate Talk) is designed not only to communicate important safety information to your employees, but also to be given to them by you, which will hopefully reinforce the message and let them know your expectations for safety. You can use the text below as a script to be rendered verbatim or just as talking points to be stated in your own words. Please also complete the attendance listing on the last page and send it to Safety & Risk, Mail Stop 66.

There's one hand tool that demands your respect over many others in the workplace, a tool that can cut you to the bone in an instant . . . the utility knife.

Utility knives are very useful for cutting strapping, puncturing shrink-wrap and opening packaging. But one wrong move and these retractable blades can do serious harm. In fact, nearly 40 percent of all injuries attributed to manual workshop tools in the US involve knives with retractable blades.

Many accidents involving utility knives occur for the following reasons:

- Drawing the knife towards you instead of away from your body.
- Working with a dull blade. (Dull blades require more force, increasing the potential for injury due to loss of control of the knife.)
- Trying to cut more than the knife can handle.
- Improperly storing the knife with the blade extended.
- Failing to wear personal protective equipment.
- Neglecting to inspect the tool before use.

There have been cases where workers have suffered injuries from exposed blade tips. This is because the blades did not completely retract into the handle. That's why it's important for workers to use the proper size blades or replace defective retraction mechanisms.

A problem may also arise if an employee doesn't have or can't find a utility knife. As a result, the employee may use whatever is handy, such as a pocket knife or other tool with a sharp edge. This can quickly turn hazardous if the tool slips or is used incorrectly.

The following are safety precautions to keep in mind when using utility knives:

- If you get distracted or interrupted while using a knife, stop what you are doing until you can focus on the task at hand.
- Wear safety glasses to protect your eyes in case a blade breaks.
- Always use a sharp blade. They are safer than a dull blade. Dull knives are more likely to slip and cut you.

- Wear cut-resistant gloves to protect your hands. But gloves are effective only if you actually wear them. Also use gloves that still allow you to easily grip the knife.
- Do not toss a knife to someone. Set down the knife and let the other person pick it up. It is also recommended that you do not hand a knife directly to someone, although if you do, you should give to them with the handle first.
- Ensure the blade is properly positioned to cut what you want before use.
- Keep extremities out of the cutting path.
- Don't apply too much pressure on the blade. Let the knife edge do the work—don't force it.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions when changing blades.
- If a knife is falling, you risk injury by trying to stop it with your hand or foot. Let the knife fall to the ground rather than trying to grab it as it falls.
- Ensure the blade is fully retracted into the handle before putting it away.
- Don't use utility knives to pry loose objects—the blades are not strong enough for that purpose and will likely break, thereby causing a potential eye hazard.
- Dispose of dull or broken blades in a puncture-resistant container or wrap them in paper before placing them in the trash.
- Avoid the use of disposable knives with breakaway blades—they are not meant for heavy use.

Utility knives are extremely handy on the job, but they can also be handy in causing serious injuries.

5-Minute Safety Talk No. 8 – Utility Knife Safety Attendance List

Presenter: _____ Date/Time: _____/_____/_____

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Send to the Safety & Risk Office, Mail Stop # 66, when completed.