

Battery powered circular saws

This Alert highlights hazards associated with the use of battery powered circular saws (battery saws).

March 2015

Background

Injuries and 'near-miss' incidents associated with the use of battery saws are increasing. Reported injuries include amputation of fingers and serious lacerations to hands and other body parts. Injuries have been reported across numerous trades, and are not limited to carpentry.

Battery saws have a number of characteristics that differentiate them from 240v powered circular saws (corded saws) including:

- many models have the blade on the left hand side, which is opposite to most corded saws
- they are typically much lighter and more compact, and
- they are generally less powerful than corded saws.



The problem

The presence of one or more of the following factors may lead to injury:

- Perception that battery saws are easier to use than corded saws and therefore safer
- Users not displaying the same degree of caution when using battery saws
- Left handed blade location is unfamiliar for most users (even those with experience) and means the blade is closer to the user's body when used right handed
- Because they are less powerful, battery saws are more prone to jamming, for example when:
 - material to be cut is outside the saw's capacity
 - the saw blade fitted is not suitable for the material being cut

- the saw is being forced through the material
- Users may be unaware that a jammed battery saw blade will stop rotating even while the trigger is depressed

Note: When this happens it may not be obvious that the saw motor remains under power. Users may try to free the jammed saw by grabbing or pushing the work-piece with one hand, while pulling the saw with the other without first releasing the trigger. Once freed the blade may rotate causing the saw to kickback onto the user or be pulled across the user's free hand.

- Users not following the manufacturer's instructions, for example by:
 - failing to hold the saw with both hands during a cut
 - failing to provide or utilise an appropriate support surface, such as a bench or sawhorses
 - failing to secure the work-piece (eg by clamping)
 - the user or another person physically holding the material while it is being cut
 - using the saw while in an awkward or restricted posture.

Control measures

Prior to using a battery saw, ensure the saw is the most appropriate tool for the work and that the person using the circular saw is:

- familiar with the specific model of saw to be used and the manufacturer's safety instructions
- competent in its use (or is supervised until competency has been achieved) and has an understanding of associated risks
- instructed on the action required in the event of malfunction (eg the blade jamming)

- cutting in an appropriately clear area and not using the saw in a restricted space
- provided with suitable saw horses or stands and a means to restrain the work-piece (eg clamps)
- provided with appropriate PPE for the task (eg eye protection)

Contact Details

Call us on: **1800 136 089**

Email us at: info@vwa.vic.gov.au

For more information on occupational health and safety, go to VWA's website: vwa.vic.gov.au

Note: This Alert contains information following WorkSafe's inquiries into the incident at the date of this report. The information contained in this report does not necessarily reflect the final outcome of WorkSafe's action with respect to this incident. WorkSafe does not warrant the information in this report is complete or up-to-date, and does not accept any liability to any person for the information in this report, or its use.