

Toolbox Talk

Table Saw Safety

If you've never used a table saw before they can be quite intimidating, and for good reason. It is a sharp spinning piece of metal after all. They range in size from large "Cabinet Saws" you would find in a commercial wood shop, to small portable units common with flooring installers or a DIY garage. Like most of our toolbox talks, we cannot let the popularity of the item assume that it is safe. Table saws have guards and features for a reason, and the user should respect them.

General Safety Practices

- Before plugging the saw in, run through these steps
 1. Set up on a level and stable surface
 2. Clamp or secure smaller saws to the work surface to avoid movement and falling potential
 3. Set up the saw away from people and fragile objects. It is very common for cut off material to fly from the saw at a very high speed.
 4. Clear the floor space around the saw so you or others don't trip and fall towards the saw. The user will be concentrating on the cut, not their feet.
 5. Check the blade is on tight
 6. Blade height should be set correctly, minimize the height to avoid unnecessary risk. (try to set 1/8" taller than the material)
 7. Check the splitting device and guard are on tight and secure
 8. Locate a push stick and keep it in reach before you start cutting
- When cutting long or wide material, set up roller stands to support the material on the back end of the saw. OR ask for help.
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) as required by your employer and the tool manufacturer. (Always wear [safety glasses](#) marked ANSI Z87.1 when using a saw)
- Remove saw dust and scraps as they accumulate. Excessive saw dust is a fire hazard, check around the motor of the saw to avoid electrical contact.

Parts of the Table Saw

Table – the flat surface of the saw. Keep this area clear of loose debris, and maintain a smooth finish to avoid catching material. Wax the table as recommended by the manufacturer.

Fence – Adjustable guide that sits on the table. Also important to keep this free from defect and burs that could catch material.

Splitter/Spreader – This sits behind the blade, often integrated with the guard. This is used to prevent the wood from pinching the blade causing a kickback.

Anti-Kickback – spring loaded "fingers" on the splitter that will dig into the wood and hold it down if a kickback occurs.

Guard – A shield, usually plastic, over the saw blade that blocks small debris from flying toward the user, and helps prevent accidental contact with the blade.

Push Stick – A sacrificial stick used to push small material through the saw. Any cut less than 4” should use a push stick to keep the users fingers away from the blade.

Together, all of these elements create a safe user experience. When any of the elements are not used, the odds of an injury greatly increase. It is never appropriate to remove a machine guard. There are some instances the guards or splitters must be removed to perform a certain style of cut, these safety features must be put back in place as soon as the user is finished to avoid exposing other people to a hazard.

Example: A hardwood floor installer sets up his saw in the garage where other people walk through. The installer has to remove the guard and splitter to create a dado notch in the board. After finishing the cut, the installer drops the blade all the way into the machine so no one walking by makes contact with it.

Training

There are no specific training certificates needed to operate a table saw, however it should be standard practice for employers to thoroughly train new users. As mentioned earlier, table saws are intimidating and dangerous, a new employee should feel comfortable with the machine before being left to use it.

Questions for you

1. Is it appropriate to remove saw guards?
2. What other hazards might exist when using a portable table saw? (hint: [Temporary Power](#))
3. Have you ever had a close call on a table saw, what could you have done differently?