



Safety

## The 4 Most Common Industrial Injuries and How to Avoid Them

Kip Hanon | Feb 22, 2025

Being good at your job is one way to earn raises and get promoted. Avoiding injuries is another.

Employees who frequently receive work-related treatments at the emergency room not only experience physical pain but may also face disciplinary action for failing to follow mandatory safety procedures. The takeaway: Neglecting safety rules can cause more than one kind of harm.

While getting reprimanded by the boss is bad enough, other consequences may be far more severe: Injury or even electrocution after failure to follow **lockout/tagout procedures** during industrial equipment maintenance; burns that might have been avoided by practicing good flammable material hygiene; and bruises or broken limbs because of falls from high places.

Such accidents can also lead to lost wages due to time away from work—time spent healing at home, or worse, healing in a hospital or rehabilitation center.

For instance, a **2022 report** by the National Safety Council outlined a litany of occupational injuries requiring roughly 14 days away from work, among them “exposure to harmful substances or environments” (634,080 sick workers, mainly due to the Covid pandemic, but also exposure to electricity, chemicals and temperature extremes); followed by “overexertion and bodily reaction” (521,350 injuries due to lifting, pushing, turning, holding, carrying or throwing, as well as repetitive motion); and “slips, trips, and falls” (450,540 workers).

### OSHA Requirements

Fortunately, there’s no shortage of government agencies and other organizations concerned with worker safety: The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and even the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Each has specific responsibilities related to worker safety, whether it's to regulate machine guarding or determine standards for personal protective equipment.

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Perhaps the best known agency is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (***OSHA***), a Department of Labor unit charged under a 1970 federal law (the Occupational Safety and Health Act) with ensuring that employers provide a workplace "free from recognized hazards that are causing, or are likely to cause, death or serious physical harm to employees regardless of the size of business."

Further, OSHA makes certain that workers can report violations or unsafe conditions "without fear of unlawful retaliation."

OSHA lists ***injury and illness statistics*** similar to those reported by the NSC, many of which come from the manufacturing sector, with men more accident-prone than women.

Overall, illnesses have declined significantly since the National Safety Council's 2022 report, although hearing loss, skin disorders and respiratory conditions still make up their fair share of OSHA cases. (Hearing and respiratory protection go far to minimize those, however, while safety gear such as gloves, together with proper cutting fluid maintenance, help to reduce rashes and other types of skin irritation.)

## Preventing Manufacturing Accidents

Injuries, meanwhile, continue to dominate manufacturing's Days Away from Work, Job Restriction, or Transfer (DART) category. Here are ways to avoid some of the most common:

### Slips, Trips and Falls

Floors should be kept clean and dry, with well-lit working areas free of any tripping hazards. If ***hazardous areas exist***, mark them with safety signs, and if those areas are high above the ground (a mezzanine, for instance), guardrails should be present. Evaluate whether slip-resistant footwear is called for; otherwise, install safety treads in slippery spots. And for workplaces where scaffolds, ladders and aerial lifts are needed, make certain to use personal fall arrest systems and inspect them regularly.

### Struck-By Incidents

OSHA uses the term "struck-by incidents" as an umbrella description for objects, equipment and vehicles hitting people. Anyone who owns or rents forklifts should certify them and their drivers, training them on blind spots, load limits and stability. Then, make sure to keep pedestrians separate from forklift traffic with no-walk zones and high-visibility clothing as appropriate. If there's a chance anyone in the facility might be struck by falling objects, hard hats are in order; the same goes for safety glasses to avoid being hit by metal chips from machining equipment or flying debris in a cabinet shop.

### Caught-In, Caught-Between Accidents

This category refers to being trapped inside, or crushed by, equipment. It's the reason why CNC machine tools are equipped with ***door interlocks***, and manual equipment like engine lathes and grinders have spindle/wheel guards. Whatever the machinery, don't disable or uninstall these safety devices. Operators should never wear loose clothing or ponytails around any power equipment—wood

chippers, excavators, trenching machines or saws of any kind—to keep from accidentally getting pulled into it.

## Exposure to Harmful Substances

*Thanks largely to OSHA* and other safety-focused agencies, workers today face far *less risk from hazardous chemicals* than they once did. Even so, care is still needed. Oils, solvents, adhesives, cleaners, etc., should be stored in approved containers with proper labeling. Depending on the chemical, workers and storage areas need adequate ventilation systems—for many machine shops, this means installing mist collectors. In some worksites, respirators or face masks or even a powered air-purifying respirator might be needed.

Finally, don't forget worker training, for these situations and others, including *electrical safety, waste disposal*, fire prevention, *repetitive motion injuries*, lifting and overexertion, and the nemesis of anyone working with metal, wood, plastic, paper or meat for a living: cuts.

"Finding and fixing hazards before they cause injury or illness is a far more effective approach" than responding afterward, *OSHA says*. "Doing so avoids the direct and indirect costs of worker injuries and illnesses and promotes a positive work environment."

**What are your best tips for avoiding common industrial accidents? Tell us in the comments below.**

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