



LEGAL ADVISORY

Subject: Nail Gun Safety
Date: Updated January 2011

INTRODUCTION

Nail guns are extremely dangerous tools; all safety precautions regarding the use of nail guns should be taken very seriously. Nail guns have become increasingly popular over the past two decades. These powerful tools increase the speed of construction work and help workers avoid the repetitive stress problems associated with hammers. However, nail guns can also be extremely dangerous, causing injuries to not only the extremities such as hands, feet, arms and legs, but potentially fatal injuries to the head, neck and heart. Workers may be seriously injured by errantly discharged nails as well as chips of wood or concrete flying off of nailed surfaces. The rise in use of nail guns has been matched by a correspondingly high increase in injuries. Much of the risk is inherent in the design of these powerful tools, but just as much risk stems from the misuse of nail guns. Knowledge of how these tools operate and important safety rules can prevent many injuries, and possibly save lives.

Nail gun safety rules are particularly relevant to Habitat for Humanity affiliates because the risk of injury is particularly present when inexperienced volunteers use these tools.

To minimize the risk of injury associated with nail guns, affiliates should have an understanding of the types of nail guns and how they operate. In addition to providing an overview of how nail guns work, this advisory also provides a list of minimum safety precautions that should be communicated to all people on a Habitat worksite where nail guns will be used.

TYPES OF NAIL GUNS

The most important distinction to make is that between sequential trip nail guns and coil type nail guns. Sequential trip nail guns require two steps (the “sequence”) to fire each nail: (1) depressing the trigger and making contact with the surface to be nailed, and (2) releasing the trigger and pulling it each time the user desires to fire a nail. Coil type nail guns also may have a trigger, but they are configured to fire a nail each time the nose makes contact with a surface while holding down the trigger. Coil type nail guns generally make for quicker work, but pose a much higher risk of firing at unintended objects by mistake. Many of the injuries that take place with coil type guns occur when a co-worker just happens to brush against the gun, or when the user of the gun changes position and bumps the gun against his/her own body or nearby objects.

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ADVISORY

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HFHI strongly recommends that affiliates use only sequential trip nail guns. Affiliates involved in large amounts of construction may save time (and thus money) with coil type nail guns because of their speed; however, affiliates should not prioritize efficiency and lower costs over safety. The amount of time that can be saved on a Habitat worksite by having nail guns that fire on contact is not worth the increased risk of injury. Because manufacturers and the construction industry have been choosing speed and efficiency over safety, sequential trip nail guns are becoming less common. If your affiliate has no choice but to use coil type nail guns, restrict the use of these tools to those individuals on the worksite who possess a high level of skill or experience.

Furthermore, affiliates should take note of the distinction between nail guns used for roofing and trim opposed to nail guns used for framing. Framing nail guns can be either sequential trip or coil type nail guns; however, framing nail guns are generally configured for the use of nails that are three inches plus long and entail greater force of pressure. Therefore, framing nail guns can be especially dangerous (compared to roofing and trim nail guns that require less pressure and drive nails that are about an inch long.) Also, more people tend to be involved with the installation of framing compared to other types of construction work, which means that framing nail guns may be used in more congested areas. For these reasons, affiliates may want to consider limiting the use of framing nail guns on the worksite (based on the level of skill and experience of the workers). In any case, it is HFHI's policy that no child under the age of 18 be allowed to use any type of nail gun.

SAFETY TIPS

- Always read and understand the manufacturer's manual.
- Nail guns should only be used by those crew members who possess a high level of skill or experience.
- Always wear safety glasses.
- Always keep your finger off the trigger when the gun is not in use.
- Never assume the tool is empty.
- Never point the tool at anyone, even if it is empty or disconnected from the air supply.
- Keep your free hand out of the line of fire.
- Keep others out of the line of fire.
- Keep extremities away from the business end of the nailer.
- Never try to nail beyond your reach – take the time to get a ladder.
- Never support or backup a workpiece temporarily with a foot or knee.
- Always disconnect the tool before clearing jams or performing other maintenance. Maintenance should only be performed by the experienced members of the group.
- Use sequential trip nail guns when possible, and coil types only when a safe record of use and experience with the tool has been developed.
- Never leave a nail gun unattended where an inexperienced crew member or minor could access it.

CONCLUSION

Nail guns are extremely dangerous tools. While volunteers should be able to enjoy their time on the worksite, they should take safety precautions extremely seriously. The best way to prevent injury is through educating the workers and through supervision.

**For more information, please contact the Habitat for Humanity International, Inc. Legal Department.*

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