There’s no question that nail guns boost productivity on a construction site. They can fire several nails every second. Their speed and force are very useful on the job, but they can be deadly if a nail is fired into your head, neck, or chest.

Wounds from nail guns are a common struck-by object injury. Struck-by object injuries occur when a person comes in contact with a falling, flying, swinging, slipping, or piercing object that is in motion.

Struck-by object is the leading cause of lost-time injuries (LTIs) in Ontario’s homebuilding sector.* Most of these injuries involve being struck by fasteners such as nails, brads, and tacks. Compressor tools such as roofing nailers, strip nailers, coil nailers, and brad nailers are the main culprits.

If a nail hits your eye, you could lose your sight. If it goes into your head, neck, or chest you could die. The most common injuries are to the hands and feet, but even they can cause permanent damage. It only takes one careless movement to seriously injure yourself or someone else. However, proper training, regular maintenance, and safe work practices can help you prevent nail gun injuries.
Training

Everyone who uses a nail gun requires training. They may be a common tool on construction sites, but that doesn’t mean every worker is familiar with every kind of nail gun or every type of trigger. If you’re an employer, never take it for granted that someone knows what to do. Train your workers on the specific model of nail gun they will use on your site, and familiarize them with the work area where they will use it. Show them how the safety features work. It’s a good idea to demonstrate the specific task before starting work.

Maintenance

As with any tool or piece of equipment, proper maintenance is essential to ensure that your nail gun will work the way it’s supposed to. An unexpected malfunction could lead to a critical injury. Always use the proper kind of nails for the gun. Don’t try to get away with using nails that you think are similar enough. It’s not worth getting hurt.

Always inspect your nail gun before you use it to make sure it’s in working order. Check that all the safety features are intact. Never try to modify or override the safety features, such as by tying the nose contact in the activated position.

Before you reload your nail gun or clear a jam, always disconnect it from the air source or remove the cartridge. In fact, you should do that before performing any sort of maintenance on your nail gun. Any time you aren’t using the gun, engage the trigger safety device. You can also disconnect the gun from its power source.

Safe work practices

When nail guns and other compressor tools are used safely, they can be indispensable. By following these safe work practices, you can avoid nail gun injuries.

- Always wear the proper personal protective equipment—including eye protection.
- Keep your hands and fingers off the trigger when you are not using the nail gun.
- Never carry a nail gun with your finger on the trigger.
- Do not allow anyone who has not been trained to operate a nail gun.
- Never point a nail gun at anyone.
- Keep your hand and fingers well away from the path of the nail. Use clamps if necessary.
- Do not try to reach too far when you are using a nail gun. You need to be holding it firmly.

For more info about nail gun safety, download the Nail Gun Safety Talk at ihsa.ca/safetytalk

Nail guns with sequential-trip triggers are much safer than contact-trip triggers, which can fire accidentally if the nail gun recoils or the operator bumps against something. Studies have shown that using sequential-trip triggers can cut injury rates in half without affecting productivity.

*Statistics provided by Ontario’s Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, which classifies LTIs by CSA Accident Category Description.