Angle grinder work incidents

WorkSafe has released new guidance on the use of workplace angle grinders after 31 serious workplace injuries with them over the past 12 months.

They’re among 117 injuries involving grinders of all types in the past year and which resulted in workers compensation claims.

The director of WorkSafe’s Manufacturing, Logistics and Agriculture Division, Ross Pilkington, said angle grinders had the potential to cause serious injuries.

“They are incredibly powerful machines as they are designed to be used on metal.

“They can easily cause life-threatening lacerations or, if an attachment breaks, can throw pieces of it into the eyes of the user or others who are nearby.

“Attachments must be matched to the machine they’re to be used on. If the machine operates at 15,000 rpm using one rated to a lower speed increases the chance of it breaking and causing damage.

WorkSafe’s new publication, Safe use of angle grinders, identifies the potential hazards and consequences, and what can be done to prevent them.

In the past two months 11 safety incidents with angle grinders have been reported to WorkSafe of which eight resulted in injuries.

These incidents included severe lacerations to the hands, arms and legs some of which resulted in surgery, electrical shocks, and fires caused by sparks which landed in rubbish or vehicles.

The Metropolitan Ambulance Service has reported similar injuries from domestic settings, including a man who lost the sight of an eye.

“These are machines which must be used by people who are well trained, who have the job well set up and who understand the potential hazards and how to prevent them.

“Employers have the principal duty to ensure the work is done safely and that the people doing it have the right equipment, including appropriate protective clothing, and that it is used.

“Even then, people with considerable experience suffer injuries because angle grinders can kick back and injure the user, however it is essential the basics are in place,” Mr Pilkington said.

Angle grinders are used in many occupations, but particularly in the metal fabrication industry which will be subject to a 12 months WorkSafe campaign from July 1.

Angle grinder safety tips
- Ensure the angle grinder is an appropriate tool for the task,
- Angle grinder attachment needs to be appropriate for the task and the materials being worked
- Angle grinders and their attachments need to be in good working condition.
- Ensure electrical connections are safe,
- When working with an angle grinder, the work should be performed in the best working zone, between the worker’s shoulders and knees,
- Make sure any angle grinder you buy has safety features including an anti-kickback safety clutch and a braking system to stop the wheel quickly;
- Don’t use attachments that are worn or damaged,
- Don’t use if the guard is in the wrong place or not attached at all,

More detailed information on angle grinder safety can be found in Safe use of angle grinders and Prevent misuse of angle grinders as saws which can be found online at www.worksafe.vic.gov.au.