

Guidelines for Exacto Knife Use

Exacto knives are among the most useful tools available for detailed cutting. The most common form of this tool is the pen-shaped knife shown on the right. It comes with a replaceable blade that is pointed and extremely sharp. It is this design that makes it so useful, but also so potentially dangerous. This fact sheet outlines the proper use and handling of exacto knives for optimum safety.



Potential Hazards of Exacto Knife Use

The most obvious hazard that exists with exacto knives is the potential for cuts and punctures. These dangers can be minimized by following proper safety rules, recognizing the hazards, and using the proper personal protective equipment.

Personal Protective Equipment

Always wear safety glasses or goggles when working with an exacto knife. Not only can a piece of cut material enter the eye, but the blades are also brittle and can break under stress. A broken piece of blade ejected toward the eyes moves faster than you can react, and safety glasses will prevent serious eye injuries. Gloves should also be worn; either heavy duty leather or metal mesh gloves designed specifically for working with sharp objects.

Cutting

Using a cutting board or mat placed on a stable surface, grip the handle of the knife with all four fingers and place your thumb on the collar. If possible, secure the material in a clamp before cutting. Otherwise, grip the material behind the cutting blade. ALWAYS cut away from your body, and be sure others are not in the path if the knife should slip.

Slicing and Chopping

To slice strips of material, grip the handle of the knife with three fingers and place the index finger on the collar. Slice the material by drawing the blade back diagonally. To chop material, use firm, even pressure and rock the blade as you push it downward.

Storage and Transport

Always store and transport an exacto knife with a protective cap in place. If a cap is not available, place it in a container that will not leave the blade exposed. Be sure to label the container so others are aware that the knife is inside. Never carry an open exacto knife in your pocket or place it in a drawer.

Use Only Sharp Blades

Dull, chipped, or broken blades require more force to perform the cutting operation safely, and they may slip from the working surface. Change them regularly, or if you notice that it takes more effort to cut. If the collar does not easily open to allow you to remove the old blade, lubricate it with penetrating oil, wait about 30 minutes, and try again. If it remains stuck, pad the collar and gently apply force with a pair of pliers. Once the collar is free, carefully remove the old blade (again, be sure to wear gloves when performing this task), slide the new blade into position, and tighten the collar. Wipe off any remaining oil so that the knife will not slip in your hands. Test the collar to be sure that the blade is secure.

Disposal of Old Blades

Dispose of old blades by placing them in a sharps container. Never throw them into the trash. Be sure to empty the sharps container regularly to prevent overflow.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding the use of exacto knives, please call the Department of Environmental Health and Safety at 8-8182.