



# Learning Alert

## Utility Knife Medical Treatment Injury

Incident details		
<b>Contract number:</b> RS27-02	<b>Project name:</b> Dale Road Rising Main	<b>Date:</b> 15/03/18
<b>On site location:</b> Adjacent to Whitehall Road		
Incident summary		
<p>The injured person (IP) was removing nylon banding from a coil of 32mm MDPE pipe using a Stanley knife with a manually retractable blade. When cutting the banding closest to the floor, with the force applied upwards and towards his body, the knife cut through the banding and made contact with the inside of the IP's left leg midway between the knee and the groin causing a puncture wound.</p> <p>The JNB First Aider cleaned and bandaged the wound. The IP taken to was taken to the accident and emergency department and had two stitches. The IP returned to work at the start of the following shift.</p>		
Photos		
		
<p><b>Photo 1:</b> Pipe coil with nylon banding</p>		<p><b>Photo 2:</b> Knife used to cut banding</p>
Root causes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 'Group 5', manually retractable blade knife was used</li> <li>• The operative cut towards his body and lost control of the blade</li> <li>• Formal training or instruction is not provided for the safe use of knives</li> </ul>		
Learning: What do I need to do? What do we all need to do?		
<p>Knife injuries often happen when there is an uncontrolled movement of an exposed blade. The knife slips during cutting and comes into contact with worker's other hand or, as in this case, another part of their body.</p>		
<h3>What action can I take to reduce knife injuries?</h3>		
<p><b>1</b></p>	<p><b>1. ELIMINATION</b> - The most reliable course of action is to eliminate or reduce the use of knives – lots of cutting tasks on our sites can, for example, be carried out using scissors/snips/shears rather than a knife.</p>	 



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**2. SPECIFY THE RIGHT KNIFE** – where it has not been possible to eliminate the use of knives you need to consider the ‘best’ (i.e. safest) type of knife for the task being undertaken. Knives can be grouped as explained below.

**Note - Group 1 are the safest type of cutting tools and Group 5 the least safe.**

**GROUP 1** – includes bladeless cutters such as reel snails and disposable concealed blade knives. Not only is the blade concealed but since the blade does not need to be changed; the risk of injury during blade replacement is ruled out.

**GROUP 2** – Enclosed blade – the blade edge is concealed greatly reducing the likelihood of personal injury. These are cutters with changeable blades.

**GROUP 3** – Fully-automatic blade retraction knives – these do not rely on the operator to retract the blade. It doesn't matter whether the thumb slider or squeeze lever is held in the blade extend position; when the blade leaves the material being cut it auto- retracts into the handle.

**GROUP 4** – Semi-automatic blade retraction knives have a relatively weak spring linked to the blade. Once the thumb slider has extended the blade and the process of cutting has begun, the operator removes their thumb from the slider. The blade will remain engaged with the material being cut, but as soon as the blade leaves the material – whether by design or fault – the spring will immediately pull the blade back into the safety of the knife handle.

**GROUP 5** – Manually operated blade retraction knives need to be manually retracted and extended. If the blade leaves the cut because it has slipped, or for some other reason, the blade will remain exposed.

**Note:** Lots of the knives used on our sites are employee's own rather than knives issued by the company. There is no point taking the time to specify and supply safer knives if people continue to use their own fixed blade knives – **these should be withdrawn from use.**



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**3. ENSURE THAT ENOUGH KNIVES AND BLADES ARE AVAILABLE** - If there are not enough of the safety knives available then people will be tempted to *not* use the right tool for the job. Consider issuing a knife to each person so that they don't have to go searching for the correct tool or 'make do' with an inappropriate tool.

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**4. SPECIFY THE RIGHT PPE** – e.g. cut resistant gloves

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**5. TRAINING** - The cutting technique employed when using a safety knife is often different to when using a fixed blade knife. Occasionally in trialling a safety knife, it will be discarded by an operative because “it's rubbish, the knife I use is perfect”, or, “my knife does the job faster”. Another common comment is “I need a longer blade!” People need to be given adequate instruction in safe working practices so that they are not a danger to themselves or others. Please ensure that all personnel using knives have been briefed using the JNB Tool Box Talk – [‘Safe use of Knives’ on the document library – or click here.](#)

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**6. CHECKING AND MONITORING** - As with all work equipment, knives should be checked periodically to ensure they are safe to use and defect-free. Periodic monitoring should be carried out when people are using knives to ensure they are following agreed safe working practices (see [TBI](#) for further details).

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**7. DO NOT ASSUME THAT TASKS PERCEIVED AS ‘ROUTINE’ ARE WITHOUT HAZARDS AND DO NOT REQUIRE RISK ASSESSMENT OR INSTRUCTION.**

Please ensure your teams are briefed on the above incident and associated learnings.

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