

Safe use of knives in horticulture

Purpose:

To promote the safe use of knives in horticulture

Why: To reduce the risk of cuts or serious injuries when using knives in horticulture.

TIAH Capability Framework area:

This aligns with the knowledge and skills in the Health and Safety area.

<https://tiah.org/tiah-capability-framework>

Talk leader instructions:

- Prepare to do the talk in a suitable/quiet location with no distractions
- Consider using some of the resources as part of the talk, e.g. showing a video
- Engage with participants, ask questions and give everyday examples
- Conclude with a brief review
- Get everyone to sign the form. Make sure to write the name of the farm and the date. Keep a copy in your Health and Safety records
- Ensure all participants have access to a copy of this document to refer to once the session has finished. This could be electronic and emailed or printed

Background

Knives and cutting tools are a common cause of injury at work. They're used in many workplaces, including meat and food processing and agricultural and horticultural environments.

To avoid cuts and injuries, you must take great care when using knives and be aware of the risks associated with using them in your work, which will be highlighted in the risk assessment.

You should always be fully trained in the safe use of knives. This may be done through your organisation or an external training provider. Some catering businesses require 6-monthly training for insurance purposes, so this may be worth considering as best practice within your horticulture business.

Main learning points



A safe system of work

This is a list of instructions to help you carry out a task safely.

Q: What do you think might be included in a safe system of work?

Responses may include:

- Always use the correct knife for the job – this may be a folding knife or sheath knife for example
- Knives should be issued to individuals and checked for integrity and damage daily as a minimum
- Never leave folding knives protruding from benches
- If using a locking knife, always lock the blade before use
- If a sheath is provided, always use it when the knife isn't in use
- Always follow any training – never use a knife unless authorised to do so
- Don't wave or slash the knife around near others. Use carefully considered manoeuvres
- Don't work too closely when working with others. Despite some fields being very large, certain areas can become crowded in working areas
- Wear the correct PPE (Personal Protection Equipment), including cut-resistant gloves. In some cases, you may be required to wear an arm guard or long glove for extra protection
- Always cut the crop as trained and away from your body to prevent injury
- Hand the knife back to authorised personnel at the end of the day or shift, or store it correctly as instructed
- It's illegal to carry a knife on UK streets, so always store knives at work
- Knives should always be properly sharpened. A blunt knife is more dangerous than a sharp one. To do this you must be fully trained, or it will be the responsibility of authorised personnel
- Never pass or throw a knife to a colleague. Always lay it down for them to pick up
- Always use the handle – not the blade



Notes:

Notes:



Note: In general, knives should be washed and sanitised at least at the end of the day irrespective of how they are used. Many situations call for much more frequent sanitation. If a knife is in constant use, it need not be sanitised between uses. If, however, there's a situation where the knife could be placed in its sheath or set down on a surface, the knife should be sanitised at the appropriate concentration to treat surfaces

Remember: It's important to inform your supervisor or manager if you believe there's a risk when using a knife—for example, poor-fitting or worn PPE, a loose handle, or a broken/ blunt blade.

If you're unsure how to carry out a task safely, you must not attempt it. Inform your supervisor or manager immediately so they can ensure you receive the appropriate training.

Important: You should always comply with safety arrangements as instructed by your employer, or you could be in breach of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and may be disciplined accordingly.

Even if you believe you know a better way to use a knife at work, DON'T! You must always follow the training and guidance given to you by your employer.

Optional: Watch this short information video, Health & Safety for Horticultural Businesses (AHDB)

Please note that the section on knife safety is the first section of the video (under 1 minute) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyGUGeL6rPo&t=911s>

Knife safety risk assessment process

Option: Discuss your own risk assessment process with your group or talk through the below formal risk assessment process. You can also invite other suggestions that may not be included.



Formal risk assessment process:

1. Area of operation and risk identified

Such as the work environment, whether employees are wearing the correct PPE, whether knives are in good condition and inspected daily, and whether there is enough space for people to work.

2. Persons who might be affected

Consider colleagues, contractors, visitors, the public, and anyone using a knife in their work.

Recognise those who may be more vulnerable to risks, such as less experienced workers or those with learning difficulties or disabilities.

3. Equipment

This will be the knife itself. Remember always to use the correct knife for the type of work.

4. Risk

These are the risks involved, such as lacerations and puncture wounds. If there are several different types of knife operations, these will need to be listed on separate forms to find a clear solution for each risk.

5. Current risk control measures

Your employer will list anything done during the assessment to counter the risks involved, such as how staff operate to avoid injury.

6. Further action required

Your employer will briefly describe the knife operation and weigh up the possibility of a hazard. This helps to determine what (if any) action is required.

Suggestions/ ideas:

Notes:

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7. Probability, severity and risk factors

This is how the risk is measured from the hazard. A scale of 1 to 10 is used for both the probability and severity, as shown below:

- **Probability**
 - 1 = Something is rarely going to happen
 - 10 = Something is happening regularly
- **Severity**
 - 1 = The victim might have a nervous shock
 - 10 = The possibility of one or more fatalities occurring
- **Risk factors**

This is the probability and severity totals multiplied together to give a measurement of the risk involved with that particular assessment.

8. Priority

By prioritising risk, your employer can address those areas where a knife cut is most likely to occur first. This is done by using a scale such as Low (L), Low to Medium (LM), Medium (M), Medium to High (MH), and High (H).

Once they have prioritised the risks, they will look at how each risk (in order of priority) can be eliminated, or if that isn't possible, how it can be reduced significantly to greatly reduce the risk.

Discussion points



10 minutes

Q: What other precautions can you take to help minimise the risk of cuts and injuries from knives?

Responses might include:

- Concentrate on what you're doing
- Check that the handle of the knife isn't loose. If it is, don't use it. You must always report a damaged knife to your manager or supervisor
- Ensure the handle is clean and dry – You're more at risk if the handle is wet or slippery
- If the knife falls or you drop it, don't attempt to catch it
- Always stow your knife correctly if you need to do another task with your hands – even if it's just only one hand you need
- Take designated breaks to avoid lack of concentration and repetitive task injuries

Q. Scenario: Julia was halfway through her shift as a horticultural operative harvesting cauliflower. She wasn't feeling well that day and skipped her break because she had a busy day ahead. She lost concentration when her knife slipped and cut her finger. She didn't want to make a fuss, so she carried on.

What should Julia have done to help reduce the risk of cutting herself and help prevent injuries from happening in the future?

Responses might include:

She should have taken sick leave if she was unwell or told her manager how she felt.

Why? You may not be as alert and able to concentrate if you feel unwell. If her manager knew Julia was unwell, they could have assessed the risks and decided whether Julia was fit enough to continue her work safely.

She should have taken her designated break even if they were busy

Why? Work breaks give employees time to relax and manage stress so they can return to their work refreshed and focused.

She should have immediately stopped what she was doing, reported the accident to her manager and ensured the cut was properly assessed.

Why? Julia may have required medical attention and been at risk of infection as the cut wasn't cleaned immediately.

Reporting an incident or near miss is essential. It can help analyse safe working practices and identify potential risks so that necessary changes can be made to help reduce the risk of injuries in future.

Knives are often used within the horticultural and agricultural sectors. Incorrect use can result in severe injuries and even amputations. By working with care and attention and always following safe working practices, employees can help reduce the risk of injury to themselves and others.

Resources:

Please note that some of the below resources may relate to the use of knives within other industries or countries. Always follow any training and safe working practices provided by your employer. If you are unsure how to use a knife safely at work, speak to your manager, supervisor or employer for further training or guidance.

SAFE Work Manitoba (Canada): Knife Safety: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nr-Xjl0GWo4>

Clover Safe (USA): General Knife Safety: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/sutteryuba/files/102502.pdf>

Moving Edge: Knife Risk Assessment: <https://www.movingedge.com/discover/knowledge-base/knife-risk-assessment/>

HAS (IE): Knife Safety: https://www.hsa.ie/eng/your_industry/fishing/hazards/knives/

GOV.UK (UK knife law): Selling, buying and carrying knives and weapons: <https://www.gov.uk/buying-carrying-knives>

HSE: Hand knives: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/textiles/hand-knives.htm>

Toolbox Talk participants

Toolbox Talk: **Safe use of knives in horticulture**

Name of farmDate

Talk leader name.....

Name	Signature	Date