

STITCHY FINGERS

Your Rights

As an employee you have a number of legal rights to have your health and safety protected at the workplace. The GMB works with good employers to ensure that the best health and safety standards apply for members.

However, your employer has a legal duty to safeguard your health, safety and welfare at work. Under health and safety law your employer must:

- carry out a risk assessment - this means that your employer must identify things at the workplace that could harm you. Having done that, your employer must put measures in place that prevent the risk or chance of you being injured. In relation to work equipment, this means that you are properly trained;
- the equipment is safe to use;
- you have enough information to use the equipment properly;
- work is effectively supervised.
- consult with you and GMB Safety Representatives over a range of health and safety issues.
- provide you with *free* personal protective equipment - such as chain mail gloves, for example - when it is provided to reduce a risk of injury.

These are a few of the rights that you are entitled to at work. However, the GMB is not just interested with minimum legal standards. The GMB is seeking the *best* standards of health and safety for members.

How the GMB can help

Independent research has shown that people who are in a trade union are 50% less likely to have an accident than those who are not in a trade union.

	Injury Rate per 1,000 employees	Actual injuries in one year
Trade Union recognised	5.3	58,300
Non Trade Union recognised	10.9	181,500

Source: Reilly, Paci and Hall: British Journal of Industrial Relations, 33:2 June 1995

in other words:

you are twice as safe in the GMB

The GMB is Britain's leading union for health and safety. In each of our Regions we have a specialist Health and Safety Officer who can offer advice and help to make your workplace safer. The Union also has a National Health and Safety Department with specialist staff to support the Regions. But it is our 25,000 workplace based Safety Representatives that are the main reason why YOU'RE SAFER IN THE GMB ● JOIN US NOW!!



For further information contact:
John Edmonds General Secretary
Des Farrell National Secretary Clothing and Textile Section
Nigel Bryson Director of Health and Environment
GMB 22-24 Worpole Road
London SW19 4DD
Telephone: 0181 947 3131 Fax: 0181 944 6552



'There are thousands of preventable accidents that occur in the Clothing and Textile Industry every year. The GMB works with good employers to promote the best standards of health and safety for our members. By working together, we aim to have 'zero tolerance' of any machinery accident. This leaflet shows the success of the GMB's joint approach to health and safety. It's a success you can share in'

DES FARRELL GMB National Secretary - Clothing and Textile Section.

Spilling blood is never pleasant - especially when it is yours! However, in the Clothing and Textile Industry, there are serious accidents with work equipment and only a few types of equipment are the cause. As you work in the Clothing and Textile Industry, this leaflet has been written with you in mind.

It identifies key measures that should be in place to protect your health and safety when you are using work equipment. In the GMB - the Union for Clothing and Textile workers - we take the health and safety of our members very seriously.

Our key policy is:

'To promote the well being of GMB members by supporting safe systems of work and by preventing occupational accidents and ill health.'

By working with good employers, the GMB can assist in improving health and safety standards at

the workplace.

90% of accidents are preventable; 70% can be attributable to managerial failure. These are not GMB figures. They are estimates published by the Health and Safety Executive - the professional Inspectors.

They show that accidents CAN BE PREVENTED. The GMB is a union that believes in prevention - prevention is better than cure. Hence we put great effort in making sure accidents are avoided. This leaflet gives two examples of how accidents involving needle-in-finger and cutting machines can be avoided. It also shows how by joining the GMB, your health and safety can be protected.

Joint Working

The GMB and the British Clothing Industry Association work closely together on health and safety issues. We have established a joint National

Committee which addresses key health and safety issues in the Industry. By working together, the GMB/BCIA produce Briefing Notes on key issues. A list of the current guides are given below:

- 1 Hazardous Substances
- 2 Preventing Accidents
- 3 Health and Safety Legislation
- 4 Upper Limb Disorders
- 5 Assessments
- 6 Safety Representatives and Safety Committees
- 7 Cutting Room Safety
- 8 formaldehyde
- 9 Electrical Safety
- 10 Sewing machinery: Generic assessments

By finding joint solutions to problems, the GMB can assist companies develop solutions that work in practice. As we know the Industry, practical measures come tailor made!

YOU'RE SAFER IN THE GMB

Needle-in-Finger

Needle through fingers are the biggest cause of machinery accidents in the Clothing Industry. While many people do not view them as serious, such people are not usually the ones with their fingers stitched up. The GMB has been working with good employers to eliminate these painful and distressing accidents.

One company, William Baird, has put a great deal of effort into preventing needle-in-finger accidents. They worked with a specialist engineering company to produce a more effective type of guard. Working with GMB operators locally, the guard was tested in a Baird factory. Here the operators could talk about the operating problems they had. They were involved with the design process.

As a result of this joint work, a guard was developed which has significantly reduced the needle-in-finger accident rate. This is a fine example of a company taking health and safety seriously, then taking effective action to solve the problem. Guards are now available that will fit the majority of standard sewing machines.

As Allen Jones, Group Risk Manager, for William Baird says:

'This fully encapsulating finger guard is one of the most significant improvements in safety I have seen in a cloth



ing factory. The guard not only achieves protection of operators fingers but also protects eyes against ejection of needle particles if it shatters'

The importance of workforce involvement was particularly stressed by Allan:

'The project was also a success for communication and co-operation in that the development work was all done at factory level. Prototype guards were designed and made by on site engineers. They worked with machinists who were involved with testing the prototypes and giving feedback on their use under production pressures.'

By working together, an effective solution was made. Sheila Bearcroft, President of the GMB Clothing and Textile Section said:

'These guards have been very successful in reducing injury to our machinists. The Company has made a real improvement in health and safety by this development.'

Cutting Room Safety

Some of the most serious accidents in the Clothing Industry have been caused by hand held cloth cutters. A common piece of equipment in many clothing factories, there are a variety of types. However, they all have one thing in common: they cut fingers as easily as cloth!

Accident investigations by the Health and Safety Executive reveal what can go wrong:

'Textile cutter with eight years experience cutting a thin layer of material using a powered hand held cutter. Material snatched on blade resulting in the injured person's non-knife hand, which was resting on material, being drawn onto the blade also. Ends of two fingers amputated.'

'Inexperienced right-handed fabric cutter severed top of left thumb when using an Eastmen ...Fabric Cutter ... fitted with a 29cm blade and operating at a speed of 3,000 movements per minute.'

'Injured person was pulling material through a Phillips Band Knife when left index finger contacted blade resulting in amputation of left index finger-tip. Chainmail glove were available but not worn due to misconception among staff that it would make injuries worse.'

Guidance is available in the form of a GMB/BCIA Briefing Note on Cutting Room Safety.

The key points to prevent such injuries are:

- The cutting area needs to be assessed so that any hazards are identified and preventative measures put in place.
- The cutting room should be organised in such a way as to: keep people moving through the area to a minimum; and ensure the operator cannot be approached from behind;
- Ensure the floor is kept free from debris, kept in good condition - no holes! - and non-slip: and ensure that sunlight does not distract the operator.
- Ensure that are guards and safety equipment are properly adjusted, in place and effectively operating.
- All operates receive adequate training before operating such equipment.
- In the event that complete guarding is not possible, that protective gloves are used to prevent the risk of cuts in the event of contact with the exposed blade.
- Operating procedures are clearly displayed.
- The area must be effectively supervised.