

Developing Tools with the Lineman in Mind

By Larry Kotars

This past January marked the 20th anniversary since Huskie Tools first introduced the first battery-operated crimping tool, and as Larry Kotars, national sales manager, remembers, the company sold less than 10 in 1989. It was an uphill battle from day one with many customers less than interested in a visit from the company. Huskie Tools was the first company to go up against a \$200 tool. The mindset of the industry at the time was such that it could not comprehend such a cost, or even care why. Kotars remembers that it felt like they were the Model T going after the horse business. But Huskie doesn't just make tools, it makes tools that are comfortable for linemen – ergonomic tools. A lot of people have a much better understanding on Cumulative Trauma Disorder, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and how much employers pay in Workers Compensation Claims than they did in 1989. When making the decision to buy battery-operated tools, remember the medical cost to repair a torn shoulder muscle or wrist injury is a huge cost that comes off the bottom line. Why gamble on something you know can be prevented?

A Perfect Fit

Management and technicians have increasingly become aware of the benefits of using ergonomic power tools. Muscle strain, over-reaching, awkward positioning, sudden jarring and repetitive exertion can be avoided by simply choosing an ergonomically designed tool as opposed to a tool without the specialized design considerations.

In order for an ergonomically designed hand tool to provide the proper protection, it must fit correctly. Several considerations come into play when choosing the proper tool. For example, the handle of the tool must distribute pressure evenly across the palm of the hand. This allows the worker's wrist to remain straight. Additionally, the tool must be designed to provide the required force necessary to perform the task at hand. Minimizing hand and arm vibration, reducing repetitive motion, and avoiding awkward positions are all requirements in properly fitting tools.

The selection and fitting process is easy, as tools come in varied weights and designs to accommodate virtually every utility worker's need. Cable cutters, crimpers and

other ergonomically designed tools will make the job safer and easier to perform.

One example of how an ergonomic hand tool can increase productivity can be found in the use of battery-operated, ergonomic crimpers. When two electric lines must be fastened together, the lines are often tied together with a crimp connector. Traditionally, the crimp connector is secured to the wires by using a large, bulky, manually operated crimping tool. These types of crimping tools have led to strains in workers' arms and shoulders. At the same time, they are much slower to work with. Workers using the battery-operated crimping tool greatly reduce discomfort and risk of injury, and increase productivity. As one worker claimed, "I made 29 splices with just a squeeze of my trigger finger!" The work is healthier, and management is happy about so much being accomplished in so little time.

Understanding Repetitive Stress Injuries

A clear understanding of the potential for injury and what actually occurs creates awareness. This can cause individuals to alter their behavior and avoid such occur-

rences. Carpal tunnel syndrome is the most common and disabling type of repetitive stress injury. Cumulative Trauma Disorder (CTD), Occupational Overrule Injury and carpal tunnel syndrome are all forms of work related musculo-skeletal disorders. These types of injuries cost American companies millions of dollars a year in lost work time and workers' compensation claims.

A combination of three factors causes CTDs. They are force, repetition and bad posture. All three can result in sudden injuries such as sprains, or slow-developing injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome. The greatest risk occurs when a task or tool that requires a combination of force and precision is performed or used repeatedly without sufficient time for the body to rest.

It is critical that the worker remembers to keep the work-focus within their comfort range. A person can reduce their risk of CTD by protecting their joints. Extending a joint until it simply can't go any farther and "locking" it should always be avoided. Working in such an extreme posi-

tion not only feels awkward, but this action can over-stress muscles, pull tendons and reduce power. Keep the work within easy reach to avoid stretching, twisting and bending beyond a safe range of motion.

Designed with the Lineman in Mind

Linemen today are smart and educated and when they say, "Give me a Huskie Tool," Huskie answers.

Huskie Tools, Inc. is on its fifth generation of product upgrades, and is always striving to better serve its customers and their needs. It has a wide range of end-users, and many of the customers are investor-owned utility companies who want the best but don't want to spend the dollars and risk the responsibility of ordering the wrong product. When you purchase items off capital budget money, there will always be a concern that the money you're spending is for the right reasons. When linemen purchase Huskie tools, they feel confident they are using the right tool for the task at hand, because Huskie sells its tools with

the lineman in mind. Providing real tools for real linemen is what Huskie does best.

Rural utility agencies and urban utility companies have learned that cheap is not always the way to go. When a lineman starts his climb up a pole, he shouldn't have to worry if his battery pack isn't charged or if there is enough power to finish a crimp or make a cut. When power company foremen make decisions on behalf of the linemen to buy cheaper tools because of budget concerns, they certainly don't have the linemen in mind. It is your duty to provide your linemen with quality tools; don't substitute price for quality. □

About the Author:

Larry Kotars has been with Huskie Tools 19 years and as the National Sales Manager he works with direct sales force & Manufacture Agents in the United States and Canada.

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