

Know When to Replace Your Safety Gloves

By Rick Pedley | Tuesday, August 1, 2023



Construction workers use their hands constantly on the job—from working with various tools and equipment, to handling materials. But the average worksite is full of potential hazards that include cuts, scratches, punctures and burns that can lead to serious injury.

Once these hazards have been mitigated, wearing strong, durable work gloves is the next best way to avoid hand injuries. Some safety gloves can last up to a decade depending on how often they are used, how they are cared for and where they are stored. Everyday wear and tear, along with accidents, will eventually make these gloves less effective over time. Learn when to replace construction safety gloves so your crew can do their jobs without putting their hands at risk.

WHEN DO SAFETY GLOVES EXPIRE?

The same pair of gloves might not last forever, especially if used regularly in the field. The expiration date largely depends on the quality of the gloves, mainly the materials used to make them.

On the low end of the spectrum, disposable latex gloves usually last up to three years on the shelf, while nitrile disposable gloves can last up to five years in storage. The same applies to chloride (vinyl) gloves, neoprene and polyurethane. Kevlar gloves will start to degrade after around 10 washes.

On the higher end, leather work gloves are the most durable and may last a lifetime if used as intended.

The expiration date can also depend on the brand. Managers can check the user manual to see if or when the gloves expire. Many materials will lose their protective properties over time. The safety equipment should be stored in a dry, room-temperature location where it won't get damaged. Workers must also launder these items according to the manufacturer's guidelines to avoid damaging the gloves.

WHEN TO REPLACE WORK GLOVES



Some pairs may not last until expiration if they get damaged in the field. Their longevity depends on how well you maintain them, how often you are using them, and the type of work they're being used for. Every pair of gloves should be inspected at the start and end of every shift. Workers need to be trained to inspect this gear to decide whether it is safe. If the gloves are involved in an accident, they should be pulled out of rotation immediately. If the gloves are beyond repair, they should be properly disposed of. All potentially damaged gloves should be kept away from the rest of the safety gear to avoid being accidentally used.

Here are some warning signs that the gloves need to be replaced:

Frays, Holes and Loose Stitches

Gloves made with fabric are only as strong as the threads holding them together. Workers should look for gaps along the seams, especially around the fingers, holes that leave their skin exposed and loose threads, which are a sign that part of the material is coming undone. A durable pair of gloves will have a higher thread count to avoid fraying. Even small holes can expose workers to various hazards, including extreme temperatures, sharp objects, dust and other particulate matter; and that hole will grow larger over time.

Thin or Worn Spots

These weak points can pose a danger to workers on the job. The fabric may appear more transparent in these areas, which occur on the parts of the hand that see the most action in the field. Stress and friction will wear away at the material until it eventually dissolves, creating a hole, allowing sharp objects and extreme temperatures to pass through the material more easily.

Peeling

Many pairs have a protective coating that will slowly peel off with age. The coating can be on the gloves inside and/or outside. Sweat and friction will weaken the adhesive that keeps the coating attached.

Stains and Odors

If a pair of gloves is permanently stained or has a strong odor after it's been washed, it may have been exposed to toxic chemicals or other contaminants.

Change in Fit

Safety gloves are only effective if they fit the person's hands. Gloves that are too large can easily slip off, and pairs that are too tight can limit the person's range of movement. The fabric may expand or contract with washing and age, so every employee should check the fit before starting their shift.

Stay a step ahead of glove replacement by having additional pairs of gloves from the same manufacturer on hand—no pun intended—when your gloves get damaged or worn. Be cautious when buying a different or new type of glove. Research the manufacturer to ensure they have a good reputation in your industry. And if you're unsure if your gloves need to be replaced, it's always best to be safer than sorry and do so anyway.

WHEN TO REPLACE CHEMICAL-RESISTANT GLOVES

Chemical-resistant gloves protect workers from severe burns and injury when working with or near dangerous chemicals, including solvents, detergents, lubricants and other industrial materials. If the gloves are damaged or worn, these materials can easily slip through the cracks, putting the user at risk.

Workers should watch out for these signs that the gloves need to be replaced:

Brittle or Stiff Materials

Gloves involved in a spill or leak may feel overly stiff after washing. The worker may notice a crinkling sound or see debris falling from the surface of the gloves. This is a sign that the gloves are starting to degrade.

Strong Odors

Exposure to strong chemicals can leave the gloves with a strange smell. This is a sign the pair may be compromised. Some chemicals can be hard to remove, even with regular washing.

Leaks

There shouldn't be any way for the chemicals to leak through the material. Some holes or weak points may be invisible to the naked eye. Workers can try filling the gloves with water to see if any of it leaks out.

Construction professionals can never be too cautious when protecting their hands in the field. A quality pair of gloves is the best defense against various hazards in the field. Workers should replace their gloves when they are no longer up to the task.



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