

39 POWER TOOLS — AIR

Many different types of tools are powered by compressed air. They are fast, powerful, and ideal for repetitive tasks such as the nailing of large areas of roof decking or chipping and breaking concrete. A compressor, powered by a combustion or electric motor, supplies the air for the tools.

Air-powered tools include

- jack hammers
- chipping hammers
- drills
- grinders
- sanders
- staplers
- framing nailers
- wrenches
- brad nailers
- winches
- air nozzles
- saws
- buffers
- impact tools
- sprayers.
- Run combustion engines outside or in a well-ventilated area to prevent the build-up of carbon monoxide gas. Always keep a fire extinguisher near flammable liquids.
- When moving compressors to another location, ask for help or use mechanical devices to prevent back injuries.
- Occasionally workers suffer eye injuries when compressed air is used to blow out formwork. Wear safety goggles and respiratory protection.
- Always secure hose connections with wire or safety clips to prevent the hose from whipping except when automatic cut-off couplers are used.
- Make sure hoses are clear of traffic and pose no tripping hazards.
- Replace worn-out absorption pads and springs. Too much vibration of the tool can damage nerves in fingers, hands, and other body parts. This is called “white finger disease” or Raynaud’s Syndrome.
- Some tools have a high decibel rating – for instance, jack hammers and impact drills. To prevent hearing loss, always wear hearing protection.
- Never tamper with safety devices.
- Keep hands away from discharge area – on nailers in particular.
- Match the speed rating of saw blades, grinding wheels, cut-off wheels, etc. to tool speed. Too fast or too slow a rotation can damage the wheels, release fragments, and injure workers.
- Never use air to blow dust or dirt out of work clothes. Compressed air can enter the skin and bloodstream with deadly results.
- Turn off the pressure to hoses when the system is not in use.
- Turn off the air pressure when changing pneumatic tools or attachments.
- Never “kink” a hose to stop air flow.

Most air-powered tools need very little maintenance. At the end of the shift, put a teaspoon of oil in the air inlet and run the tool for a second or two to protect against rust.

Dust, moist air, and corrosive fumes can damage the equipment. An inline regulator filter and lubricator will extend tool life.

Before start-up, check the couplings and fittings, blow out the hose to remove moisture and dirt, and clean the nipple before connecting the tool. Set the air pressure according to the manufacturer's specifications and open gradually.

Compressed air can be dangerous. Hazards include

Air embolism	This is the most serious hazard, since it can lead to death. If compressed air from a hose or nozzle enters even a tiny cut on the skin, it can form a bubble in the bloodstream – with possibly fatal results.
Physical damage	Compressed air directed at the body can easily cause injuries – including damage to eyes and ear drums.
Flying particles	Compressed air at only 40 pounds per square inch can accelerate debris to well over 70 miles per hour when it is used to blow off dust, metal shavings, or wood chips. These particles then carry enough force to penetrate the skin.

WARNING: Make sure that air pressure is set at a suitable level for the tool or equipment being used. Before changing or adjusting pneumatic tools, turn off air pressure.