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Do-It-Yourself Danger as number of serious hand injuries rises

A leading hand surgeon is calling for greater warnings on home power tools after a rise in the number of do-it-yourself (DIY) injuries.

Dr Tim Heath, Head of the Hand Surgery Unit at Sydney Hospital, said DIY injuries had become a significant problem with home injuries now making up a growing percentage of his cases.

“Every week we see a significant caseload of serious injuries involving the home use of what are potentially deadly weapons,” Dr Heath said.

“Injuries from the use of circular saws and angle grinders are common and so are injuries suffered by people modifying tools and using them as they are not intended.”

Dr Heath said DIY injuries were often very complex involving skin, tendon and bone, and frequently required varied surgical techniques to repair.

“I’ve seen severe injuries to multiple fingers, bilateral hand injuries, amputations, and open fractures requiring hours of delicate surgery which often include a range of surgical techniques including microsurgery, tendon repairs, fracture treatment, and skin grafting,” he said.

Dr Heath said retirees were over represented in numbers presenting with DIY injuries and that more injuries occurred during holidays and long weekends.

He also put the rise in injuries down to the growing popularity of DIY home renovations.

“Very little is done in terms of public health warnings,” Dr Heath said.

“People really should have some training and a license to use some types of power tools.

“Hand injuries – even a finger injury - can change someone’s life, and often need months of rehabilitation and therapy.

“Even with the best surgery and therapy, hand function will never be the same again,” he said.

Patient Greg Lousick, 60, a former boiler maker and welder, recently suffered severe injuries to his left hand after a lapse in concentration while using an angle grinder at home.

“I’m very used to power tools through my trade, but I just looked away for a moment,” he said.

The father of six fractured three fingers, lost part of his index finger, suffered deep lacerations, required surgery including nerve repair, and is now undertaking rehabilitation in the Hand Therapy Unit at Sydney Hospital.

Mr Lousick wants to warn other handymen of the dangers and what can go wrong.

“If I was in an environment where someone was to use a power tool of that type, I would make sure they were quite familiar with the tool, they had some experience with the tool, and they were aware of the dangers, and to fully concentrate on the task in front of them,” he said.

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