



Many tasks are done so frequently or seem to be easy to learn, that we often give little thought to the specific safety concerns. Using hand tools is a task we many take for granted; thinking that everyone knows how to use any tool correctly. Unfortunately, people continue to be hurt using hand tools. This discussion covers one such commonly used hand tool: the **Sledge Hammer**.

A sledge hammer is primarily used where additional force is needed which cannot be delivered by a smaller hammer. Swing a hammer with all of the force that you have, striking a solid surface; because the surface does not have any give, all that energy is immediately transmitted back to the user. That continued return of energy; (rebound) is exhausting and can cause strain and pain.

Sledge hammers can be used to drive sign posts, break up concrete or loosen stuck utility covers. As with any tool, the safe use of a sledgehammer requires following some safety precautions.

1. **Ensure Adequate Clearance:** Before using a sledgehammer, make sure there are no obstructions on the ground that you might trip on. Also ensure that there is enough room around you so that you can swing the hammer freely. Make sure people are a safe distance away, and that you have a secure footing in your work area. Notify non-employees to stay back.
2. **Wear Safety Goggles:** When you use a sledgehammer, particles may chip off and fly. These particles can cause serious injuries when they strike your face. Co-workers should also wear PPE.
3. **Wear Protective Clothing, a Helmet and Thick Gloves:** Wear a jacket or long sleeve shirt to shield your body when you use a sledgehammer. Protect your head with a safety/hard hat. Injuries to the head can be fatal. Wear comfortable, thick gloves so that you can use the sledgehammer with ease, and avoid calluses on your palms. Some hammers are available with padded handles. There are also gloves that have shock absorbing material to reduce strain on the hands and arms.
4. **Store the Sledgehammer in an Enclosed Location:** Avoid leaving wooden handled sledgehammers out in the open. The wooden handle must be protected from excessive moisture. The handle may absorb moisture and this can cause cracking of the wood. Similarly, excessive dryness can also cause the wood to warp or shrink, damaging the fit. A handle that is not securely fit to a sledgehammer is probably the most dangerous situation to avoid.

Some vendors sell sledge hammers with fiberglass handles. Fiberglass handles are more weather resistant. They don't shrink, crack, rot, or loosen like wooden handles do when left out in the weather. If you replace a wooden handle with a fiberglass: remember that fiberglass handles are epoxied in the head not held with wedges. A protective sleeve on the fiberglass handle will help prevent splintering in cold weather

5. **Check the Handle and Hammer Head Often:** Inspect your sledgehammer regularly and ensure that the handle is secure and tight. If it is not, have the handle replaced. Also check the head to ensure that it is free of cracks or distortion. Never attempt temporary fixes such as using glue or duct tape. This could lead to dangerous, life-threatening accidents if the head comes off and you lose control of the tool.
6. **Use Sledgehammers with Heads Made of Durable Metal:** Sledgehammers that have steel heads are a poor choice, because they are not recommended for use on hard surfaces. This is because steel can easily crack and splinter, sending small pieces flying and causing injury.
7. **Avoid Using a Tool that is Too Heavy for You:** When you select a sledgehammer, try it out to see if it fits your working method and body frame. Avoid sledgehammers that are too heavy for you to work with. Also ensure that the handle is smooth and easy to carry. This is important to ensure that you can work with sledgehammer comfortably and safely over a long term. See other side.



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If you have a sledge hammer available and a willing volunteer it may be helpful to have people stand back and observe a person demonstrating the following technique, and then discuss the pro's and con's

Instructions: How to swing a large sledge hammer

1. Pick up the sledgehammer with your weaker hand. For instance, the left hand of a right-handed user is the weaker hand. Hang onto it near the bottom end, or handle butt.
2. Grasp the handle a few inches below the sledgehammer head with your dominant hand.
3. Choose whether you wish to stand directly in front of your target for a vertical swing or slightly to the side for a diagonal swing. According some experts, a vertical swing proves harder to deliver with a very heavy sledgehammer, so a diagonal stance might be your best option if you are a beginner or if you are using a heavy sledgehammer.
4. Position your feet according to your choice of stance. For a diagonal stance, place the foot on the side of your weaker hand closer to your target, with your dominant foot slightly behind you. For the vertical stance, stand with your feet shoulder width apart, centering yourself in front of the target. You should be only a couple feet away from your target.
5. Bring the sledgehammer head at the same level as your own head on your dominant side. Lift it into the air, and then drive it into the center of your target. Your dominant hand should direct the sledge in its path, while your non-dominant hand delivers the weight of the blow.

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