

Blade guard replacement options for table saws

Most new table saws are supplied with blade guards designed to prevent the operator's hands from accidentally making contact with the blade.

But in many cases, blade guards are missing or have been removed (for example, when a table saw is purchased second-hand). This puts operators at risk of serious injury.

As an employer, you are responsible for ensuring saws are equipped with effective point-of-operation safeguarding. For table saws, this means the use of blade guards and safety devices such as push sticks and jigs.

Types of guards

Most guards for table saws fall into two categories:

- The widely used traditional-style guards that mount on the saw's trunnion assembly
- The over-arm style guards that mount on the extension table

Options for guard replacement

Consider the following options for replacing guards:

- If the original make and model of the guard is still available, buy and install it.
- If the original make and model of the guard is no longer available, buy and install an aftermarket guard (i.e., a guard that serves the same purpose but may be produced by a different manufacturer).



Aftermarket guards

Many aftermarket guards provide effective protection, are operator-friendly, and fit most makes and models of saws.

One key feature to consider is whether the guard self-adjusts for different material thicknesses. Guards without this feature must be adjusted manually by the operator to keep the vertical clearance between the material and the guard to a minimum.

Traditional guards

Most traditional guards come with splitters, anti-kickback fingers or pawls, and spreaders or riving knives. These safety devices are designed to reduce the risk of the saw blade grabbing the work piece and propelling it back toward the operator (i.e., kickback).

Custom guards that fit old and new saws are available from more than 30 manufacturers. Look for a guard that is easy to install.

Over-arm guards

Over-arm guards are generally easier to adjust than traditional guards. Some models may include a dust collection system.

Over-arm guards do not include anti-kickback devices. Such devices must be added to the saw separately as required. See the manufacturer's manual for more information.

Power feeders

To increase production and improve the consistency of cuts, table saws may be equipped with power feeders. A power feeder consists of a set of powered rollers that press down on the material and feed it through the saw blade at a controlled feed rate.

Since power feeders are typically positioned directly over the blade during operation, they may function as effective point-of-operation safeguards. This eliminates the need for conventional guards.

If the power feeder is removed, and you want to manually feed material through the saw, it must be equipped with a suitable blade guard and an anti-kickback device.

Other technologies

Skin contact-sensing technology, such as a finger-sensing table saw, is a good secondary line of protection when used with a guard. In saws equipped with this technology, the blade shuts down in a split second if any part of a worker's body touches the saw blade. This technology must be used in combination with a guard unless a guard is clearly impracticable for the task.

Resources

- [Safeguarding Table and Panel Saws](#) (crew talk)
- [Guarding for Woodworking](#) (slide show)
- [Woodworking Series Safety Tips: Guarding](#) (poster)
- [Woodworking Series Safety Tips: Kickbacks](#) (poster)
- [Health and Safety for Small- and Medium-Sized Woodworking Shops](#) (booklet)

For more information and resources, go to worksafebc.com and search for "woodworking."

You can find aftermarket guards by searching online for "table saw guard."