Safe Working Procedures and Instruction

Rotary Cutter

The risk of injury when using this machine is Moderate – Level 2 Risk

All fabrics (natural or synthetic) are made of several textiles woven together. All fabrics require cutting before a design project can be completed. There are a number of different tools that can be used to cut fabric. These include scissors, electric cutters and rotary cutters.

Rotary cutters are used for cuts that need to be straight or very accurate. They are commonly used in patchwork but have many other suitable applications.

Rotary cutters are ALWAYS used on a specifically designed cutting mat, to prevent bluntening of the very sharp blade and damaging the surface being cut on. They are also used in conjunction with a special ruler or template, usually made of plastic with markings on it for measuring. This ruler in generally in imperial measurements as most patchwork is done in inches not centimetres.

Rotary cutters are available in a variety of sizes and styles but they all essentially work on the same principles.

Identified Risks and Hazards

Hazards that may be encountered when using the rotary cutter include:

- Cuts from unsafe handling and not using the safety features of the rotary cutter.
- Dropping the rotary cutter onto the feet
- Back injury due to poorly placed cutting mat on a bench or table.

Cuts can occur from touching the blade. Use caution when you use the cutter to ensure that the blade is secured under the safety guard.

Pre-Operational Safety

The following safety checks and precautions should be carried out when preparing to set up and use the rotary cutter in the textiles area:

- Ensure you have had instruction and training in the use the rotary cutter and satisfactorily completed the relevant OHS test.
- The operator should seek permission from the teacher before using the rotary cutter.
- Always check that the cutter, mat and ruler are in good working order.


ONLY registered users of ‘OnGuard’ STP are permitted to copy this blackline master.
• Check all safety features carefully before commencing any cutting operation.
• Check that the cutting mat is safely positioned on a desk or table top at an appropriate height, never on the floor.
• Never cut with the rotary cutter without a cutting mat underneath your work and never use a ruler other than a specifically designed plastic one. This includes wooden and metal, these are unyielding materials and will damage the blade and the fabric you are intending to cut.
• The work area should be clean and free of equipment, rubbish and other obstacles.
• Set up the cutting mat at the right height for you on a table or bench, ensure it will not slip.
• Whether you’re sitting or standing, you should be able to place your palms on the table top without bending your arm or your back.

Operating Safety Precautions

• Ensure that the workpiece rests flat on the cutting mat and table at all times.
• Never stand in an awkward or unbalanced stance while cutting with the rotary cutter.
• Keep hands well away from the blade when the rotary cutter is being used.
• When the cutting operation has finished, ensure the safety features are locked in place before placing it in its storage area.
• Make sure all other students keep away from the immediate work area at all times.
• Do not wear loose clothing, especially long sleeves and neck ties.
• Secure your hair in a tie or hat.
• Never leave the rotary cutter unattended when safety features are not locked in place.
• Check with the teacher about the fabric type before cutting, not all fabrics are suitable for this type of cutting.
• Make sure the cutting mat and bench top is at an appropriate height for you and is stable.
• Keep fingers away from the blade whilst cutting.

Daily Maintenance

Daily maintenance of the rotary cutter should include checking the condition of the blade, checking the operation and height of the cutting mat and checking the condition of the ruler.

Rotary Cutter Storage

• When you’ve finished cutting, ensure the rotary cutters safety features are engaged.
• Always store the rotary cutter in a locked cupboard or drawer.