

SPRING- WINDING TOOLS:

Are they worth the investment?

By Chris Brand
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Shoulder injuries are prevalent in the garage door industry, and scientific data suggest that spring-winding tools may help reduce their occurrence. Despite this evidence, some companies may find it difficult to justify the cost of spring-winding tools.

In this article, we examine injuries plaguing the garage door industry, the potential costs these injuries incur, and the benefits of buying and using spring-winding tools.

Meet Samuel Rivera

Rivera, owner of Express Overhead Doors and Gates in New York City, knows firsthand the toll that shoulder injuries can take on a technician and a company's bottom line. Rivera started working in the garage door industry when he was 21 years old. In the last 18 years, he has undergone two rotator cuff surgeries on his right shoulder. Now, at 39, he is experiencing similar symptoms in his left shoulder.

After each surgery, Rivera took four months off to recover. During that time, he struggled to survive on the 66% of pay that workers' compensation provided.

"I wish they had spring-winding tools when I first started working," Rivera said. He

agreed to share his story so novice technicians wouldn't have to suffer what he has endured.

Are injuries an industrywide issue?

Tom Murnan of Omaha Door and Window tackles this question in the summer 2017 issue of Door + Access Systems magazine in the article, "Preventing rotator cuff injuries in the garage door industry."

Murnan said, "Shoulder injuries, specifically rotator cuff injuries, constitute a high number of injuries in the garage door industry. The cause is usually due to repetitive tasks, overhead reaching, and heavy lifting.

"The risk of injuries has increased as the working population ages. Yet, little information and few safety products exist

for garage door installers. The cost of these shoulder injuries is significant, arising from loss of productivity, reduced quality of life, medical bills, and increased insurance premiums."

Challenges for employers

As technicians in the workforce are aging, they become more susceptible to repetitive motion trauma and potential injuries. Finding young technicians willing to enter the door trade can also be a challenge, sometimes because of the inherent risks of the job. When technicians cannot work, and new employees cannot be hired quickly, companies can lose revenue and fail to meet their current fixed costs.

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Can we prevent common injuries in our industry?

A breakthrough clinical study, reported in the spring 2018 issue of *Door + Access Systems*, revealed that the Surewinder spring-winding tool can have a dramatic impact on reducing shoulder strain.

The study was conducted by Dr. Anthony Harris, a board-certified doctor in occupational and environmental medicine. Using sophisticated and innovative testing techniques, Dr. Harris determined that using winding bars creates a 40% increase in muscle burden compared to using spring-winding tools.

“Without a doubt, using a winding tool like Surewinder makes the most ergonomic sense for saving shoulders and wrists over the course of a career,” said Dr. Harris. “This long-term safety makes winding tools a no-brainer compared to using winding bars.”

This study proved there are clear advantages to using these tools, but are those benefits worth the expense?

COSTS OF INJURIES

When a technician suffers a minor or major injury while on the job, it directly impacts the company’s bottom line. Doctor and physical therapy visits can add up. A minor injury, such as a small sprain or ligament strain, can result in additional costs and/or loss of profits.

The company may have to reschedule the job, pay another technician overtime, or

they could lose the job altogether. If the firm offers sick pay, they may also have to pay additional labor costs while the injured employee recovers.

Example: Minor injury leads to lost revenue

Suppose that an employee suffered a sprain and missed three days of work. Assume that the company pays five sick days per year. How does this injury affect company profits?

If that technician generates \$1,500 of gross revenue per day, that’s \$4,500 in lost revenue. If the tech is paid \$25/hour, that’s \$600 in labor costs paid out as sick days.

Example: Major injury leads to lost revenue

A major injury, such as a rotator cuff tear, can require surgery and physical therapy. This can incur significant losses for the technician and the company.

For example, suppose an employee has rotator cuff surgery and misses 65 days, or three months, of work. Assuming that the technician generated \$1,500 of gross revenue per day, that’s \$97,500 in lost revenue. If the technician is paid \$25/hour, that’s \$13,000 in lost wages for the employee. In addition, the employer may also be faced with increases to the company’s medical insurance.

BENEFITS OF SPRING-WINDING TOOLS

Spring-winding tools can be advantageous for technicians and garage door business

owners. The benefits range from improved worker efficiency to direct financial returns and rewards.

Increase in productivity

Technicians can install and wind springs more efficiently when using winding tools, especially for heavier-gauge wire springs. They also make it possible to wind two springs at once, which saves time. Minimizing fatigue and increasing productivity enables the technician to complete more jobs in a shorter amount of time.

OSHA requirements

Providing employees with spring-winding tools helps employers meet requirements outlined under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. The act states:

- If hazards exist, eliminate or minimize them.
- If workplace hazards cannot be eliminated, provide employees with adequate safeguards and protective gear.

Tax credits and grants

A company may be eligible for IRS-approved R&D tax credits for conducting research to prove whether spring-winding tools do, indeed, improve safety. A tax attorney can advise how much money spent on tools, experiments, studies, and employee salaries qualifies for the tax credit.

Also, many states offer OSHA grants to companies that test tools and technologies designed to improve the safety of technicians.

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Workers' compensation discounts

Business owners are required by law to have workers' compensation insurance. Requirements vary by state, by industry, and even by the size and structure of a business and its payroll. Businesses that fail to carry compulsory workers' compensation insurance can face fines, lawsuits, or even criminal charges.

If the company has an active safety program, many states provide incentive programs. For example, North Dakota offers employers with risk-management programs a 5% discount on annual workers' compensation premiums.

Other states offer premium reductions for firms that adopt basic injury and illness prevention programs. Those states include Colorado, Delaware, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Wyoming. (See OSHA Injury and Illness Prevention Programs White Paper, January 2012.)

Insurance discounts

In addition to state incentives, insurance companies also offer discounts to companies that offer safety programs. Justin Bartmess of The Insurance Shop, said, "Based on my experience, if the business has at least \$200,000 or more in payroll, 1-2 years of coverage, and a good claims history, they could save 15%-20% on their workers compensation premium."

To qualify for the insurance discount, "The agent needs to understand the benefits of using the tool and [business owners] need to provide the underwriter with a short YouTube video to help them visualize the increased safety the spring winding tool creates for your company," said Bartmess.

The money saved through these discounts will pay for the investment in spring winding tools. For example, if technicians are paid \$52,000 per year and the company's current worker compensation rate is 5.5%, the 20% discount on the premium would pay for the cost of a \$570 residential spring winding tool and/or help pay for a \$1,000 commercial spring winding tool for multiple technicians.

As businesses continue to use these safety tools and lower worker compensation claims, they can further reduce worker compensation premiums by lowering their three-year experience modifier.

Happy employees

Okay, we've established that a spring-winding tool can benefit your company. What about your employees?

Establishing a safety-focused culture has benefits for your workers beyond the physical. When they know you care about their personal well-being, it increases morale, engagement, awareness, motivation, and productivity, according to Daniel R. Nobbe, plant leader at Fiberteq in Danville, Ill.

Technicians will appreciate that you care enough about their physical and financial well-being to buy tools that can help improve

their health and increase their longevity.

This awareness can lead to increased levels of happiness, satisfaction, and engagement. When employees are emotionally invested in a company, they want to contribute to make the company better.

Because I'm president of Surewinder, you would expect me to promote our specific product. But the more important issue here is the health and longevity of your employees. From my perspective, investing in a spring-winding tool is a smart business move that benefits you and your employees. ■

BENEFITS OF SPRING-WINDING TOOLS

Testimonials from users

"I love this spring-winding tool. I'm a small-business owner and do most of the installs myself. I bought the tool because I cannot afford to be injured. I think it's worth every penny and definitely cheaper than going to the emergency room."

—Trevor Robins, T&L Garage Door, Missoula, Mont.

"The upfront cost of a spring-winding tool is far less expensive than the cost of a shoulder surgery. If we can make it easier for our guys in the field and reduce injuries in the process, it's pretty much a no-brainer."

—Rich Love, Overhead Door of South Bend-Mishawaka, Ind.

"After using this tool for the past nine months, our 45 techs love the Surewinder. I feel this spring-winding tool is a real game-changer for our industry. Most of our techs were suffering from varying degrees of shoulder pain and now few, if any, report shoulder discomfort. This includes technicians from 45 to 55 years of age."

—Jim Rapp, Precision Overhead Garage Doors, Tampa, Fla.



"Our E-Z Ratch tool eliminates the need for winding bars and is easy and safe to use. It can reduce labor time by 60%. I think it's a tool that every guy in the industry needs to have in their hands."

—Brian King, SafeRatch, Johnstown, Pa.