



## SLEDGEHAMMER BEST PRACTICES

Using hand tools is a task we may take for granted. Unfortunately, people continue to be hurt using hand tools. This discussion covers the Sledgehammer.

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

### 1. Choose the Best Tool for the Job.

Is the sledgehammer the best choice for driving the post or breaking up concrete? There are options.

### 2. Check the Handle and Head Before Use and Often During the Job.

Inspect your sledgehammer regularly and ensure that the handle is secure and not damaged. Never attempt temporary fixes such as using glue or duct tape. Also, check that the head is free of cracks or mushrooming.

### 3. Avoid Using a Tool that is Too Heavy for You.

This is important to ensure that you can work with a sledgehammer comfortably and safely over the long term. Also, consider how you are feeling TODAY. If you are not at your best, let someone else use the tool, even if you can handle the tool on other days.

### 4. Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

- **Protective Eyewear:** When you use a sledgehammer, particles may chip off and fly. These particles can cause serious injuries when they strike your eyes and face.
- **Thick Gloves:** Wear thick, well-fitting gloves to grip and use the sledgehammer securely, and avoid calluses on your palms. Consider gloves that have shock-absorbing material to further reduce strain on the hands and arms.
- **Helmet:** If the sledgehammer will be raised higher than the head, wear a hard hat.
- OSHA also recommends face and neck protection. Nearby co-workers should also wear PPE.

### 5. Ensure Adequate Clearance and Stable Footing.

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.

### 6. Control Your Swing.

Swinging a sledgehammer with all of the force that you have is dangerous because the surface you are striking often does not have any give, which means all that energy is immediately transmitted back to the user. That continued return of energy (rebound) is exhausting and can cause strain and pain.

Swing the sledgehammer with the minimum arc needed to achieve the task. Avoid raising the hammer over your head. This is rarely needed. Let the tool do the work.

### 7. Store the Sledgehammer Properly.

Avoid leaving wooden-handled sledgehammers outside. 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 of the head.

## How to Swing a Large Sledgehammer

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 the 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 to 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 of feet away from your target.
5. Bring the sledgehammer head at the same level as your 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.

