Powder actuated tool systems are used to make about one billion fastenings in an average construction year in the United States. Each of these fastenings are safe, labor saving alternatives to other methods of making fastenings to concrete and structural steel.

A powder actuated tool, as with any tool used by an individual, has the potential to inflict injury on the user or others when improperly used. This potential was recognized over 40 years ago when manufacturers initiated training and licensing programs to enhance the safe use of their products.

In 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration mandated training and licensing for all users of powder actuated tools through the adoption of the ANSI A10.3 standard which established safety requirements for powder actuated tools.

Injuries involving powder actuated tools are relatively few compared to the high volume of fastenings made and compared to the many other types of tools found in common use. Even these injuries can be further minimized or eliminated by taking advantage of training programs provided by tool manufacturers, user safety awareness and common sense.

In order to comply with the OSHA requirements, a tool operator must be able to:

—Read and understand the instruction manual provided with the particular tool.
—Clean the tool and recognize worn or damaged parts.
—Recognize defective tool operation.
—Recognize the color code and number system for powder loads and power levels that are used with the tool.
—Use the tool correctly within the limitations of its use in the presence of the instructor.

Although these requirements may sound complicated, they are really very simple and quickly learned.

There are general safety precautions that a tool user and bystanders must follow, along with operational differences that vary between types of tools and between tools offered by different manufacturers. A few of the most basic safety precautions are:

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—Be sure the tool is unloaded before handling. Remember, just as with a gun, it is the “unloaded” tool that can cause an injury.
—Always wear personal safety gear.
—Eye protection will protect against flying particles such as concrete.
—Hearing protection protects those with sensitive hearing to noise from fastening into steel or in confined areas.
—Never place your hand or fingers over the front end of a tool. This is good habit to form to avoid careless closing of a load tool.
—Know the base material being fastened into. Make fastenings only into concrete or structural steel per the instruction manual. Fasteners can easily penetrate drywall, cause flying fragments in brittle material and ricochets in hard materials. Use the center punch test in the Operator’s Manual for guidance.
—Always make fastenings perpendicular to the base material and hold the tool firmly in place. This results in better quality fastenings and less potential tool damage.
—Never load a tool until you are ready to make a fastening, and never leave a loaded tool unattended. This prevents another person from picking up an “unloaded” tool and causing an injury.
—Never leave powder loads lying around a job site or loose in a tool box. Keep loads locked up when not in use. This can prevent someone from using the wrong powder level or unauthorized persons from gaining access to live loads that could cause an injury.

There are other safety precautions provided in specific tool manuals. Take the time to read and understand these instructions. If you have questions, don’t hesitate to call your supplier or the manufacturer for assistance.

Please remember, the safe and efficient use of powder actuated tools in the hands of a trained and licensed operator will help get your job done quickly and on a cost efficient basis. Just as with driving a car, nothing replaces a driver who knows and follows the rules, respects the power potential and uses good common sense.