

How to Choose the Right Work Glove for the Job

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Hand injuries are among the most common workplace injuries across every trade — and most of them are preventable. The right glove for the job doesn't just protect the hand; it lets the worker do the job well. A glove that's too bulky reduces dexterity and gets pulled off. One that's rated for the wrong hazard provides false confidence.

The challenge is that “work glove” covers an enormous range of products. Cut-resistant gloves for glass handling look nothing like heat-resistant welding gloves, and neither resembles a waterproof insulated glove for cold storage work. The standards behind them are different, the materials are different, and the fit requirements are different.

This guide breaks down the major glove categories — cut-resistant, heat-resistant, grip, cold/temperature, and waterproof — explains the ratings that govern each, and provides job-type recommendations so workers and employers can match the right glove to the actual hazard.

Cut-Resistant Gloves

Cut-resistant gloves are the most widely used category of protective gloves in industrial and construction work. They are governed by ANSI/ISEA 105, the US standard for hand protection performance, which defines nine cut levels — A1 through A9 — based on how many grams of force are required to cut through the glove material.

The higher the level, the greater the force required to cut through. A1 is appropriate for light work with minimal cut risk. A9 is for the most severe cut environments. Most general construction and industrial work falls in the A3–A5 range.

ANSI/ISEA 105 Cut Levels

Level	Cut Force (grams)	Protection	Typical Applications
A1	200–499 g	Light	Light assembly, packaging, inspection
A2	500–999 g	Low	General work, light sheet metal, parts handling
A3	1,000–1,499 g	Light-Medium	Auto assembly, electronics manufacturing
A4	1,500–2,199 g	Medium	Metal stamping, appliance manufacturing, HVAC
A5	2,200–2,999 g	Medium-High	Glass handling, metal fabrication, construction
A6	3,000–4,499 g	High	Heavy sheet metal, recycling, demolition

Level	Cut Force (grams)	Protection	Typical Applications
A7	4,500–5,999 g	Heavy	Scrap handling, sharp debris, industrial cutting
A8	6,000–8,999 g	Very High	Heavy industrial, wire rope handling
A9	9,000+ g	Maximum	Highest-risk cut environments

What Cut-Resistant Gloves Are Made Of

The cut resistance of a glove comes from the fiber or blend used in the liner. Common materials include:

- **HPPE (High-Performance Polyethylene)** the most common cut-resistant liner, lightweight and dexterous. Used across A2–A6 levels.
- **Dyneema** a brand of ultra-high-molecular-weight polyethylene, exceptionally strong for its weight. Common in A4–A7 gloves.
- **Kevlar** aramid fiber with excellent cut and heat resistance. Used in both cut-resistant and heat-resistant gloves.
- **Steel fiber / stainless steel** woven into the liner for the highest cut levels. Common in A7–A9 gloves for glass and scrap handling.
- **Leather** provides abrasion and puncture resistance, often used as a palm reinforcement over a cut-resistant liner.

A Note on EN388

Many gloves — particularly imported brands — carry an EN388 rating instead of or alongside ANSI/ISEA 105. EN388 is the European cut standard. The older EN388 system used a letter scale (A–F); the updated standard includes an ISO 13997 cut test result alongside the Coup test. When comparing gloves, verify which standard the cut rating refers to — they are not directly equivalent.

Don't overspec cut levels

Higher cut resistance typically means thicker, stiffer material and reduced dexterity. A worker doing precision assembly work in A7 gloves designed for scrap handling will likely remove them — which is worse than wearing a well-fitted A4 glove. Match the cut level to the actual hazard, not the highest available rating.

Heat-Resistant Gloves

Heat-resistant gloves protect against thermal hazards: contact heat from hot surfaces, radiant heat from flames or molten material, and the sparks and spatter produced by welding. The governing standard is ANSI 105 and/or EN407, which rates performance across six thermal hazard categories using a six-digit code printed on the glove label.

Not all heat-resistant gloves are equal, and not all are designed for the same hazard. A welding glove designed for MIG welding — where high dexterity and arc spatter protection matter —

looks and performs differently from a foundry glove designed to handle extremely hot objects for brief periods.

Welding Gloves

Welding gloves are leather-palm gloves with extended cuffs to protect the wrist and forearm from spatter. MIG welding gloves are heavier and more protective; TIG welding gloves are thinner to allow the dexterity needed for precise torch manipulation. Both use leather — typically cowhide, pigskin, or goatskin — with Kevlar stitching that won't burn through.

Welding gloves are not rated in the same way as general heat-resistant gloves, and they are not appropriate for all high-heat applications. They are optimized for arc spatter and radiant heat at welding distances, not for picking up hot objects from an oven or furnace.

High-Heat and Foundry Gloves

For handling hot objects — from ovens, kilns, foundry work, or industrial baking — gloves are rated for contact heat in seconds of protection at specific temperatures. Aluminized gloves reflect radiant heat and are used in foundry, glass, and furnace environments. Wool or terry-lined gloves provide oven and food service heat protection.

What to Look For

- Identify the specific heat hazard: contact, radiant, or spatter. They require different solutions.
- For welding, match the glove to the process — MIG/flux-core for heavy protection, TIG for dexterity.
- For high-contact heat, look for the ANSI 105 contact heat rating — the third digit in the six-digit code.
- Extended gauntlet cuffs protect the wrist and lower forearm in welding and foundry applications.
- The ASTM F1060 is the test procedure used for ANSI 105. It says to meet one of the six categories for heat if must meet the following criteria:
 - **Time to Pain:** The glove must provide at least 4 seconds of warning before the user feels pain.
 - **Time to Burn:** The glove must withstand the temperature for at least 15 seconds without causing a second-degree burn.

Grip Gloves

Grip gloves are coated work gloves designed to improve handling performance across a range of surface and environmental conditions. The coating type determines where the glove performs best — a grip coating that works well on dry materials may perform poorly on oily or wet surfaces.

Coating Types and Where They Work

Nitrile (flat or sandy) — The most versatile coating for industrial work. Flat nitrile works on dry and lightly damp surfaces. Sandy nitrile has a textured, abrasive finish that grips oily and wet surfaces effectively. Common in oil and gas, metal fabrication, and general industrial work.

Foam nitrile — An open-cell foam structure that wicks away liquid and provides excellent grip in wet or oily conditions. Lighter and more breathable than solid nitrile. Preferred in warehousing, assembly, and light industrial applications where dexterity matters.

Polyurethane (PU) — Thin, flexible coating that provides good grip on clean, dry surfaces. Excellent dexterity for precision work — electronics assembly, quality inspection, parts handling. Not suitable for wet or oily environments.

Latex — Provides strong grip on irregular surfaces and some resistance to abrasion. Effective wet and dry. Less common in industrial applications due to latex allergy concerns, but still used in construction and landscaping.

Double-dipped nitrile — Two layers of nitrile coating for extended durability in rough conditions. Common in waste handling, demolition, and environments with abrasive materials.

Grip and cut resistance are not mutually exclusive

Most cut-resistant gloves — A3 and above — are available with grip coatings applied over the cut-resistant liner. A foam-nitrile coated A5 glove gives you both cut protection and grip in oily conditions. Specifying gloves by cut level alone doesn't account for the surface conditions the worker will actually face.

Cold-Temperature and Insulated Gloves

Cold-temperature gloves protect against two distinct cold hazards: convective cold (cold air, wind exposure during outdoor work) and contact cold (touching cold surfaces in refrigerated or freezer environments). These require different constructions and are rated separately under EN511.

Outdoor Winter Work

For outdoor workers in cold weather — construction, landscaping, utility work, road crews — the priority is insulation against ambient cold and wind while maintaining enough dexterity to work. Gloves for this application typically use a thermal liner (Thinsulate or similar), a windproof outer shell, and often a waterproof membrane to handle snow and rain exposure.

Dexterity matters here. A worker who can't feel tools or grip properly will remove the gloves. Insulated gloves with a thinner profile — particularly those with stretch outer shells and lighter-weight insulation — hold up better in practice than heavily padded options.

Cold Storage and Freezer Work

Cold storage and freezer environments present contact cold as the primary hazard — touching frozen products, metal shelving, and surfaces at sub-zero temperatures. Gloves for this work need a liner rated for contact cold exposure and are often made with a cotton or acrylic liner inside a waterproof outer shell. Grip on wet and icy surfaces is also a consideration.

EN511 provides a three-digit rating system for cold protection gloves: the first digit rates convective cold performance, the second rates contact cold performance, and the third indicates whether the glove is waterproof (0 = not waterproof, 1 = waterproof). A rating of 2/2/1 indicates moderate convective and contact cold protection with waterproofing.

What to Look For

- For outdoor cold: prioritize insulation rating and windproofing. A waterproof membrane is useful in wet winter conditions.
- For cold storage: prioritize contact cold rating and grip. Waterproofing is important in environments with moisture or thaw water.
- In sub-zero freezer work, avoid gloves with metal hardware — it conducts cold directly to the hand.
- Consider liner-and-shell systems for variable conditions: workers can remove the outer shell when they go inside and keep the liner for light tasks.

Waterproof Gloves

Waterproof gloves keep water out of the glove construction, which matters both for comfort and for maintaining grip and dexterity when working in rain, with wet materials, or near water. There are two main approaches: coated gloves and membrane-lined gloves.

Coated Waterproof Gloves

Fully coated gloves — latex, nitrile, or PVC over a knit liner — are inherently waterproof because the coating forms a complete barrier. These are the most common waterproof gloves in construction, concrete work, landscaping, and environments with chemical exposure. They are generally not breathable, which makes them uncomfortable for extended wear in warm conditions.

Unlined or lightly lined coated gloves are the standard for concrete and masonry work where both waterproofing and abrasion resistance matter. For chemical resistance, the coating type must match the specific chemicals present — nitrile resists oils and many solvents; latex resists many acids; PVC is broadly resistant but lacks dexterity.

Membrane-Lined Gloves

Gloves with a waterproof breathable membrane — similar to the construction used in waterproof outerwear — keep water out while allowing moisture vapor from perspiration to escape. These are common in outdoor winter work where both waterproofing and breathability matter during high-output activity.

Membrane-lined gloves are typically more expensive than fully coated options and offer better long-term comfort in sustained use. The waterproofing is maintained as long as the membrane is intact, but these gloves cannot be repaired if the membrane is punctured.

What to Look For

- For concrete, masonry, and outdoor general work: fully coated nitrile or latex is durable, affordable, and effective.
- For outdoor winter work with high activity: a membrane-lined insulated glove balances waterproofing with breathability.
- For chemical work: verify the coating material is resistant to the specific chemicals present — not all coatings protect against all chemicals.
- Check cuff length. A short cuff on a waterproof glove lets water run in at the wrist. Extended cuffs or gloves that seal against a sleeve are better for sustained wet exposure.

Quick Reference: Glove by Job Type

Use this table as a starting point. Many jobs require gloves that combine protection types — a cut-resistant grip glove for metal fabrication, or a waterproof insulated glove for outdoor winter work. The “Priority Protection” column identifies what matters most for each application.

Job Type	Priority Protection	Recommended Glove Type
Construction — general	Cut A4–A5, grip	HPPE-lined, nitrile or foam-nitrile coated
Glass handling	Cut A6–A8	High-cut HPPE/Dyneema, leather palm reinforcement
Welding	Heat, spark, cut	Leather MIG/TIG gloves, Kevlar stitching
Metal fabrication	Cut A5–A7, grip	Cut-resistant HPPE, sandy nitrile coat for grip on oily metal
HVAC / sheet metal	Cut A4–A5, dexterity	Lightweight cut-resistant, PU or nitrile coated
Oil & gas / industrial	Grip on wet/oily surfaces, cut	Foam nitrile or double-nitrile coated, cut A4+
Cold storage / freezer work	Cold, grip	Insulated liner, waterproof shell or nitrile coating
Outdoor winter work	Cold, waterproof, dexterity	Waterproof membrane liner, thermal insulation
Landscaping / groundskeeping	Cut, grip, thorn	Leather palm, reinforced thumb, A3–A4 cut
Concrete / masonry	Abrasion, waterproof	Rubber-palm or latex-coated, waterproof
Food processing	Cut A4–A6, washable	HPPE knit, food-contact safe, washable
Electrical / low-voltage work	Dexterity, light grip	Thin PU or nitrile coat — for live-work, use rated insulating gloves

Electrical work: a critical note

Standard work gloves — including cut-resistant, grip, and general-purpose gloves — provide no protection against electrical shock. For work on or near energized electrical systems, OSHA requires rated electrical insulating gloves (ASTM D120 / IEC 60903) tested to the appropriate voltage class. These are specialty PPE items, not standard work gloves. Never use standard work gloves as a substitute.

Fit, Sizing, and When to Replace

A glove that doesn't fit correctly doesn't protect correctly. Gloves that are too large bunch at the fingers, reducing grip and increasing snag risk. Gloves that are too small fatigue the hand and restrict circulation. Most gloves are sized XS through 2XL based on hand circumference — measure at the widest point of the palm.

Replace gloves when:

- The coating has worn through, cracked, or separated from the liner.
- The liner shows visible cuts, holes, or thinning in the palm or fingers.
- Grip has noticeably declined on surfaces that previously required little effort.
- Waterproof gloves allow moisture through to the liner.
- Seams are separating or stitching has pulled out, particularly at the thumb gusset.

For employers running a glove program, tracking replacement frequency by job type helps optimize purchasing and identify tasks where glove durability is a recurring issue — often a sign that the current glove isn't matched well to the actual conditions.

Find the Right Glove at Work 'n More

Work 'n More stocks work gloves across all major categories — cut-resistant, heat-resistant, grip, cold-weather, and waterproof — from brands trusted in construction, industrial, and outdoor work environments. If you're outfitting a crew and need help matching gloves to specific job hazards, our staff can work through the requirements with you.

Browse our full glove selection at worknmore.com or stop in at any of our Washington locations.