



# Curatorial Safety

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## Sharp, Rusty Metal in Collections

On occasion, museum staff will be working in attics, basements, barns, and other outbuildings doing surveys, historic preservation work, finding previously unknown collections, relocating collections, etc. Oftentimes these areas are dark, have limited accessibility (headroom and other clearance), and can be literally full of unknown hazards. One of these hazards is sharp, rusty metal.

Tools (rakes, shovels, scythes, knives, planes, etc.), agricultural implements, steamer trunks with metal components, historic fabric (especially wood with nails), and countless other items can possess sharp metal surfaces that can injure you, sometimes severely.

The following are a few safety suggestions when working among these hazards:

- Wear a pair of heavy-duty leather work gloves.
- Wear a pair of heavy-duty leather boots with a heavy sole. (The NPS-issue work or heavy-duty hiking boots are great. You'll still need to be careful not to step on a nail though.)
- Wear a hard hat in areas without adequate head clearance (nails, bolts, or other sharp metal objects might be protruding downward through the rafters, roof, or other overhead surfaces).
- Wear a pair of coveralls over your clothes. If you contact a piece of sharp metal, the extra thickness of cloth may help protect your skin from being scratched or cut.
- Use and employ adequate lighting to illuminate potential hazards. To eliminate the possibility of an electrical fire, use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns rather than electrical lights with extension cords.
- Make sure to look thoroughly for any hazards before you step, sit, or kneel on the floor, as well as touch, lift, move, or carry an item.
- Like any museum operation, take your time. You don't want to hurt either the object or yourself.