

Safe Operation of a Table Saw (Timber Cutting)

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

1. Purpose

To prevent amputation, kickback, and serious injury when using a cabinet or contractor table saw for ripping, cross-cutting, or grooving timber, plywood, MDF, and other sheet materials.

2. Scope

Applies to all 250 mm – 315 mm table saws used exclusively for timber and timber-based sheet materials.

3. Responsibilities

Operator: Must be trained, authorised, and never remove or defeat any guard or safety device.

Supervisor/PCBU: Ensure only authorised operators use the saw and that riving knife, crown guard, and push sticks are always available and in good condition.

4. Major Hazards

- Contact with spinning blade (above or below table)
- Kickback of workpiece
- Blade rising unexpectedly
- Dust inhalation (especially MDF and treated timber)
- Noise

5. Mandatory Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Safety glasses or face shield (AS/NZS 1337.1 medium impact)
- Hearing protection (Class 5 – table saws exceed 90 dB(A))
- P2 disposable respirator when cutting MDF, treated timber, or creating large amounts of dust
- Steel-cap safety boots
- Close-fitting clothing – NO GLOVES, loose sleeves, jewellery, or long hair (tied back and under cap)

6. Training & Authorisation

Only persons who have:

- Completed documented in-house table-saw training
- Been assessed competent on this exact machine
- Current authorisation recorded

may operate unsupervised.

7. Pre-Operation Checks

- Blade sharp, correct type (rip or combination), no missing teeth
- Riving knife fitted, 2–8 mm behind blade, and no more than 5 mm below top of blade
- Crown guard (hood) in place and adjusted to <10 mm above workpiece
- Anti-kickback pawls (if fitted) sharp and free
- Fence parallel to blade and lockable
- Dust extraction connected and port clear (minimum 100 mm hose)
- Push sticks (minimum two) available and undamaged
- Emergency stop/kick-switch (knee bar or paddle) tested
- Table and floor clean – no off-cuts or sawdust build-up

8. Safe Operating Procedure

Set-Up

- Adjust blade height so highest tooth is no more than 10 mm above workpiece
- Adjust riving knife and crown guard for every change of blade height
- For cuts narrower than 150 mm use push stick/block
- For cuts narrower than 50 mm use a dedicated push shoe or jig – never free-hand

Ripping

- Stand to the left of the blade (NZ standard)
- Use feather boards when practical
- Never reach over the blade
- Never “free-hand” rip – always use fence or jig

Cross-Cutting

- Always use the mitre gauge or cross-cut sled
- Never use the rip fence as a length stop on cross-cuts (use a stop block on the mitre gauge instead)

9. Shut-Down & Cleaning

- Wait for blade to stop completely
- Lower blade below table
- Vacuum or brush sawdust – never blow with compressed air while people are nearby
- Empty dust-extraction bag when $\frac{2}{3}$ full (outside wearing P2 mask)

10. Absolutely Prohibited Actions (Zero Tolerance)

- Removing or raising the crown guard for normal cuts
- Removing the riving knife (except for dado/grooving with manufacturer-approved guard)
- Wearing gloves while blade is turning
- Standing directly behind the workpiece
- Free-hand cutting
- Reaching over or past the blade to collect off-cuts
- Leaving the saw running unattended
- Cutting round or unstable material without jigs

11. Emergency Procedures

- Hit the large red emergency stop or knee bar immediately
- If kickback occurs: let go of workpiece and step back
- For any blade contact: keep limb still, call for help, do not pull away
- Call 111 immediately for serious injury

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