

# A Sharp Reminder of What Can Happen When You're *Running* on Fumes

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**M**y wife and I recently were blessed with the birth of our second daughter. As any new parent likely will tell you, having an infant in the house teaches you lessons about sleep deprivation. In my case, I learned a painful lesson about the consequences of using tools while sleep deprived.

Not long after the birth, I decided the garage could use a facelift and some organization, so I drew up plans for a shelf system and set to work. I tend to get wrapped up in projects like this, and these shelves were no exception. Somewhere along the way, I decided slotted shelves would look more professional.

By 2200, I had the bottom two decks looking sweet, and after a 20-minute warning from my wife, I started notching the posts for the upper deck. Anyone reading this story probably has experienced that moment when enough of a project is done for the day, but one more thing catches your eye. It was during one of those moments when my wife returned, stood silently, and smiled at me. Genius that I am, I took her silence to mean 20 more minutes and plotted the best way to get the top shelf done before calling it a night... bad idea.

As it turns out, she was headed to bed. I should have followed but instead put chisel to task and continued chipping away, all the while wondering why she hadn't said anything.

The notch I was working was just a few inches above my head, and I already had roughed it out. I just was clearing the cutout when my brand new, half-inch Buck Bros. wood chisel slipped and drove into my left hand, just behind my thumb. All I could think about were the exposed tendons behind my left thumb—now there's something you don't see every day.

My initial reaction was annoyance with my stupidity. As I trudged up the stairs, shaking my head, the excruciating throb of severed muscle set in. After a two-hour trip to an emergency room and recounting my sob story to a disapproving nurse, I returned home and did what I should have done hours earlier: got some sleep.

In reviewing what I accomplished by working "just a little longer," I realized several things, starting with the fact I didn't finish that one last shelf. I also didn't get to enjoy a few moments of quiet time with my wife between feedings. I injured my left hand, which reminds me even now that I should have called it quits when I had the chance.

Without enough sleep, I had the motor skills of a 3-year-old. My ability to make rational decisions obviously was impaired, and I neglected to evaluate the risks and benefits as I worked into the night. Had I taken time for even a cursory risk evaluation, I wouldn't have felt rushed to complete a job that, frankly, could have waited.

Before I perform another do-it-yourself task, especially something like a garage remodeling, I'll make sure I have the time to do the job correctly, without feeling rushed. When working with dangerous tools, I'll always ensure I'm well-rested and in the right condition to use the tools. Most importantly, I'll always go to bed when my wife tells me to—that's ORM at home! ➤

## Resources:

- Individual Off-Duty Risk Assessment Form (off-duty risk potential and intervention and prevention strategies), <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/articles/recreation/iraform.htm>
- 3,500 Sailors Help Refocus ORM (results of ORM task force from Naval Safety Center that met with Sailors in San Diego in January 2007 to discuss future of ORM), [http://www.news.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story\\_id=27561](http://www.news.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=27561)
- Chisel Safety Tips, [http://www.stanleytools.com/default.asp?TYPE=STATICLEFT&PAGE=tooltips\\_chisels.htm&LEFT=left\\_solutions.htm](http://www.stanleytools.com/default.asp?TYPE=STATICLEFT&PAGE=tooltips_chisels.htm&LEFT=left_solutions.htm)
- Chisels—Essential Woodworking Tools (types of chisels, chisel construction, using a chisel, taking care of your chisels, etc.), <http://woodworking.about.com/od/toolsequipment/p/chisels.htm>