

DrillSpotter Exit Hole Locator

by Jeremy Hess

Drilling a hole through a foundation wall or between floors can sometimes be a “guess and hope” job: guess where to drill and hope you don’t destroy anything. Recently, I had to run some wires through a block foundation in a finished basement. A small closet allowed access on the inside, and on the outside, I had only a few inches of clearance around obstacles. Drilling the hole once was the only option, and that led me to the DrillSpotter (First Edition Products, 877/276-7300, www.drillspotter.com).

This electronic tool, consisting of a transmitter and a receiver, helps locate the exit point of your drill bit. The manufacturer claims that it works with walls up to 40 inches thick — even through solid concrete. I didn’t have an opportunity to check its accuracy through such thick material, but I did find it handy a number of times on several remodeling projects.

Operation

The transmitter is placed at the desired exit point and can be held in place by double-stick tape when a helper isn’t nearby. The receiver goes

Red arrows tell the user which direction to move the receiver. When all four arrows light up, the two components are aligned. The maker claims that the device can also alert users when large metal obstructions are in the drill path.



The two-part DrillSpotter helps accurately place exit holes so drill bits don’t damage adjacent mechanicals or finished spaces. The transmitter is placed where the hole should exit, and the receiver is moved on the other side of the wall, floor, or ceiling until the two components line up. Double-sided tape can hold the transmitter if you don’t have a helper.

on the other side of the wall, and four arrows light up to indicate which direction the receiver should be moved to align the units. When the components are lined up, all four arrows light, and you mark the hole in the center of the receiver.

While I was testing the DrillSpotter, I passed it around to some of the other tradesmen I frequently work with. A plumber used it while running a new water line through a 20-inch-thick stone and stucco foundation for a

remodeling project. Using the DrillSpotter, he was able to get the hole in the easiest location for him to work without hitting the electrical service, located close by. That was a great test of the tool’s accuracy because the wall thickness required drilling from both sides. The alignment was off by 1/2 inch but proved close enough for the 3/4-inch hole — we attributed the near miss to the drill operator holding the bit at a slight angle. Our electrician also used the tool, and it made running new wires in an old building easier.

The Verdict

The DrillSpotter comes with transmitter, receiver, and a plastic storage case for about \$200. It seems like a fair price, but as a remodeler, I don’t think I’d use it enough to make it worth the cost. Mechanical contractors doing remodeling and renovation work would probably find it well worth the money, however, if it prevents even one mishap.

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It Wobbles, but It Won't Fall Down

by Patrick McCombe

When my supposedly “professional-grade” halogen-tower work light took a dive for the third time in one day, there wasn't much left worth salvaging, so I collected the sad remains and chucked the whole thing into the dumpster. It was actually somewhat therapeutic because like many tradespeople, I've struggled with cheap work lights for years. The halogen bulbs get incredibly hot, the cords are never long enough, and the wobbly, top-heavy construction makes moving them (or around them) an adventure.

A few weeks before my light's demise, I saw an ad for the Wobble Light, a unique buoy-shaped work light. Since I didn't need a new light at the time, I forgot about it — but now I had an excuse to give one a try.

The Wobble Light (Wobble Light, Chicago, Ill.; 773/463-5900, www.wobblelight.com) uses a 500-watt halogen bulb that's cooled by a small fan for longer life. A protective spring wrapped around the bulb provides impact protection, and the cylindrical lens puts out a 360-degree beam of light. But the coolest feature of this lamp is the weighted, rounded base that rights the lamp whenever you knock it over.

The Wobble Light has no cord; instead, it has a male plug built into the base. At first, I thought it would be a pain connecting an extension cord every time I used it, but the 8-foot cord on my old light was seldom long enough, anyway, so it was actually easy to get used to. A female plug is also included, so you can plug in another power tool without running two cords.



The Wobble Light is designed for abuse. Springs around the bulb holder absorb shock (above), while the tough plastic lens resists direct impact (left). Power to the light is supplied by extension cord to a male plug; a female receptacle is also included.

The Verdict

My only complaint is that at 3 feet tall and about 18 inches in diameter, the Wobble Light is a little bulky in the truck. Other than that, it works great. I especially liked the ability to move around a room without constantly stopping to adjust where the bulbs are pointing. Even though the quality and quantity of light are excellent, the real reason to buy this tool is the self-righting base. I whacked it really good more than once and

cringed instinctively each time, but nothing happened. Sometimes it took a few seconds to settle down after a good hit, but it stayed lit, no pieces broke off, and I simply went back to work. I'm hoping the makers come out with a cordless drill — I drop those a lot, too. It sells for \$100.

The Baggy Look

by Dave Holbrook

I admit it: I've gone soft, and I wish I'd done it years ago. My first pickup was still brand new when one of my employees struck its open door with a metal toolbox. It didn't have to be that way.

Although I've disparaged gatemouth bags for their untidy main compartment, not all hand tools require the near-anal level of organization I enjoy in other tool carriers. The Estwing flat-bar, my other hammer, a spare tape measure, chalkline, nailpick, headphones, 6- and 12-inch speed squares, 12-gauge extension cord, three-way power tap, cordless drill-driver, two caulking guns and tubes, and two staplers fit with room to spare in the gaping *Master Series Tool Bag* (Duluth Trading, 800/505-8888, www.duluthtrading.com).

The 1,200-denier ripstop fabric bag's 18Lx10Wx14H-inch inner compartment is ringed by 12 open pockets, where boxes of staples, a bottle of

chalk, my Wiggy voltage tester, a diamond whetstone, and other small items can go. Sixteen exterior pockets provide places for frequent grabs like utility knives, channel-lock pliers, and sheet-metal snips.

The three positive closures include a rugged-looking main zipper, attached in a single, continuous strip around the bag's rectangular mouth. At the terminus is a D-ring for padlocking. A zippered pouch on one end of the bag provides a place to keep wire nuts, the little book that came with your square, maybe a CM calculator, or a big packet of beef jerky. A velcro-flapped pouch at the opposite end holds a cell phone. A pair of speed-cinch straps on the outside secures a 2-foot level.

There are more pockets on this bag than I know what to do with. For the \$30 price tag, I just might get a second one for standard power tools, bits, and blades. I think I could get them all in.



Inside, this gatemouth bag has 12 open pockets around the edge; outside, a 2-foot level can be strapped aboard.

LAYOUT TOOLS

Unfailing Scaling. Extracting measurements from scaled drawings couldn't be easier with a *Builderscale Planreader* tape. One side of the tape has standard fractional measurements

graduated in 16ths of an inch, but the other side shows measurements on a 1/4-inch scale. The tape allows carpenters to take measurements directly from scaled drawings faster and without the risk of conversion mistakes.

According to the maker, the tape has a heavy-duty nylon-coated blade with large numerals and comes in a comfortable, shock-resistant case. It's available in 16-, 25-, and 30-foot sizes; 25-footers sell for about \$20.

Builderscale, 201/837-1218, www.builderscale.com.



Get in Line. When

you're talking about framing layout, few tools are more important than a chalk line. Unfortunately, most tool manufacturers have done little to make them last longer or perform better. The notable exception is Tajima and its new *Chalk-Rite Gear Drive Snap Line*. Instead of a twisted cotton string

that produces fuzzy lines and balls up in the housing at the first sign of wear, Chalk-Rite's

braided line makes distinct, uniform lines and lasts longer than other types of string, according to the manufacturer. The tool also has a triple-gear drive for fast returns, a folding handle that won't get hung up on your toolbelt, and a sturdy and comfortable aluminum housing. The red metallic paint job looks pretty cool, too. It sells for \$30.

Tajima, 888/482-5462, www.tajimatool.com.

LAYOUT TOOLS

Bigger Is Better. Framing squares are indispensable for layout work, but some jobs, like locating partitions, laying out tile, and squaring corners, would benefit from a little extra length. The 3x4-foot aluminum Folding ASquare by Hanson has it. With a couple of spring clamps, you could even use it for crosscutting panel products. It folds for easy storage and sells for about \$50.

C.H. Hanson, 800/827-3398, www.asquaretools.com.



Anchor Bolt Marker. With this tool, even your least skilled carpenter can transfer anchor bolt locations to sill plates quickly and accurately. The rotating head has five detented positions for anchor bolt sizes from 1/2 inch to 1 1/4 inches in diameter. After cutting the sill to length and positioning it alongside the bolts, you hold the *Bolt Hole Marker* against the bolt, and a hammer blow marks the spot for drilling. It sells for \$40 and works with both 2x4 and 2x6 plates. The company also makes a stand-up version that sells for \$45.

Big Foot Tools, 702/565-9954, www.bigfootsaws.com.

Fast-Track Layout. Although production framers have made and used layout sticks for a couple of generations now, it's surprising how many carpenters don't know about them. Instead of ticking off stud locations from a tape, these 4-foot sticks allow you to mark them on the top and bottom plates faster and with greater accuracy. You just mark the three or four studs (depending on the spacing), slide the stick along, and mark again until the wall is finished. It's a task you could give to your helper while you mark more complicated stuff like window and door locations and intersecting walls. While you could make your own sticks from scraps of plywood, the *Aluminum Layout Sticks* from Pairis are ready made and long lasting. They're available in 24- and 16-inch layouts for \$27; a version with both 16- and 24-inch spacings sells for \$30.

Pairis Products, 760/868-0973, www.bestconstructiontools.com.



COMPACTORS

Wacker Dirt Packer. Portable rammers are very effective and work fast, but the constant vibration can be tiring. According to the maker, the handle system on Wacker's *BS-50-2i* reduces hand-arm vibration by 40%. The tool also features an efficient oil-injection system that cuts down on fouled spark plugs and lung-clogging blue exhaust. Additional features include a



low-oil shutdown switch, an air filter minder, and an improved carburetor for easier starts. The *BS-50-2i* has an impact force of almost 2,700 pounds per blow, a compaction depth of 20 inches, and weighs about 130 pounds. It has a list price of \$3,425.

Wacker, 800/770-0957, www.wackergroup.com.

Tiny Power Tamper. A hand tamper is great for compacting post footings and prepping



small walkways, but using it for any duration can be tough on your arms and back. If you own a rotary hammer, you can use the Bosch *HS1828 Tamper Plate* instead. The 5-inch-square plate works with

the chip setting on your combination or demolition hammer and should be kinder to your back. It's also the perfect tool for compacting fill before patching concrete. Shanks are available with SDS max and hex mounting systems. The plate sells for about \$60, and the shanks sell for \$50.

Bosch, 877/267-2499, www.boschtools.com.

Armored Plate. Plate compactors like the Multiquip *MVH-306* are perfect for larger compacting jobs like driveways and retaining walls. The *MVH-306* has an 18x34-inch plate that generates over 10,000 pounds of compaction force. The machine can be equipped with either a gas or a diesel engine and features handle-mounted



hydraulics that make it easy to operate. A plate cover protects the bottom belt from rocks, and a steel roll cage with a skyhook protects the engine. The 675-pound machine has a list price of from \$8,800 to \$9,700, depending on the engine.

Multiquip, 800/421-1244, www.multiquip.com.

**Remote-Control Compaction.**

One of the best ways to minimize the danger of working in trenches is to keep people out of them. That's the rationale behind the remote-control *BCT13 Trench Compactor*. The operator uses a 433-MHz transmitter to control the compactor while he watches from a safe distance. According to the maker, the compactor can turn around within its own length and can work on grades up to 48%. You can find it at many rental yards that cater to professionals. Once the backfilling is done, you can challenge the kids to a radio-control demolition derby.



Bobcat, 866/823-7898, www.bobcat.com.