

Workshop Safety

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Some table-saw accidents:

- A few weeks ago, a friend injured himself with a table saw. He cut off the tip of his index finger, requiring two stitches to close off the wound. He realized something was wrong when he saw a spray of blood on his shirt. He felt nothing on his finger at first, just numbness. He bound it up and spent the night with it elevated to stop the aching, so that he could sleep. The next day the doctor put in two stitches to close it up and now it has healed, with a small scar and a numb spot.
- A couple of years ago, another friend told a similar story, this time he cut a groove in his ring finger, to the bone, but again no lasting damage.
- Lynton Dennill can tell a similar story, only his finger was almost severed and he is lucky to have regained partial use of it. He can also show you various other scars on his hands.

In all these cases, the table saw had no guard installed, for one or other reason. If there had been a guard, probably none of the above would have happened.

All of us can recount near misses, and an unlucky few can show the lasting effects. When next you see the WWA chairman, ask him to show his right index finger – a recent near-miss.

Workshop safety is important – it requires constant awareness and cultivating of good habits. How many of you have safety glasses hanging at convenient places next to your machines? What about hearing protectors? Dust masks? Gloves? Face shields? Respirators?

I have several sets of cheap goggles hanging around my workshop. One hangs on my drill press. Another set hangs together with hearing protectors on my radial arm saw (which is a Ryobi with a universal motor that is really noisy). I have a better set of safety glasses that live next to my lathe, suitable for longer use. Some people say that nothing less than a full-face shield is safe enough for a lathe, but I haven't tried one yet. To protect my hands, I use red and yellow Gardena leather gloves – I find them durable and comfortable.

Safety gear should become a habit. You need to train yourself to wear it at first, but once you are accustomed, then you will feel naked without it and will probably feel uneasy. If you are used to wearing a seat belt in car, you will know the uneasy feeling, if you drive without one.

Never operate machinery when you are tired or under the influence of alcohol or certain drugs – if you are not legal to drive, you should stay out of the workshop as well! Think before you do, and if you are not sure, pause and think, and if in doubt, don't! A recent study reported on www.wwodcentral.com showed that experienced woodworkers are more prone to serious accidents - perhaps because they get careless?

To help all our members to enter the New Year with all their digits and faculties intact, here are some suggested rules for safe working in your workshop:

Table saw, radial-arm saw or cut-off saw.

- Only remove the guards where you need to for special cuts and replace them straight away.
- Stand out of the line of the blade to avoid being hit by kick-backs.
- Use eye-protection (and hearing protection as well if you have a noisy saw like mine).
- Use hold-downs and push sticks to keep your fingers away from the blade.

- Always know where the blade is in relation to your fingers and keep them safely out of the path.
- Anticipate the event of the saw grabbing or kicking back. Some woods have in-built stresses that are relieved when you make a cut, which can result in the cut closing or the blade jamming. Watch for these, and make sure you are able to shut the saw off at a moments notice, so that you can deal with these problems as they arise.

Lathe.

- Always rotate the work-piece at least one complete rotation by hand to check for any fouling before powering the motor.
- Start with the lowest possible speed for roughing out until the piece is reasonably balanced.
- Stand aside when starting, out of the way of any possible flying debris such as loose bark or disintegrating pieces, until you are happy that it is safe to stand in line.
- Keep your hands behind the tool rest and watch out for a tool slipping off the end and trapping a finger.
- Use minimum tool overhangs between the tool rest and the work piece.
- Make sure the tool rest is secure before starting up.
- Use dust extraction for sanding or working with dry wood.
- Beware of the rotating work piece and loose clothing or gloves. Rims of bowls can be really sharp at speed. If you are working with a natural edge or other eccentric turning, be aware of spinning parts that you cannot see.
- Make sure that when you think you have set the minimum speed on the pulleys, it is not the maximum speed, or you may have a work piece disintegrate at maximum speed and spread itself around the room. (Don't ask me how I know this!)
- Keep your tools sharp – less force is needed to cut wood with a sharp edge. Know how to sharpen your turning tools.
- Make sure you know how to use individual tools, so that you know how to avoid catches or are not harmed should they happen.

Drill Press.

- Don't leave the key in the chuck. Have a regular place to put it.
- Run big drills and large cutters at the lowest speed until you are satisfied that they can be safely used at a higher speed. Mind your fingers with fly cutters – you can't see cutters at speed.
- Secure the work-piece to the table, so that should the bit grab, your fingers don't become involved.
- Use eye protection at all times. Swarf can be very painful in an eye.

Bench Grinder

- Do not remove the guards and always use eye-protection.
- Ensure that wheels stay in balance. Do not use damaged wheels. When fitting a new wheel, stand aside when starting for the first time, and let the wheel run for a few minutes, until you are satisfied that it is safe.
- Dress wheels regularly to ensure that they remain sharp, round and in balance.
- Avoid using the sides of the wheel. (Except for light duty jobs, such as sharpening drill bits, when it is much easier to line it up by eye.)
- Watch where the sparks land, they could start a fire!

Planer- Thicknesser

- Do not remove the guards.
- When feeding close to the cutter head, use a hold-down or push-stick, particularly with small parts, so that your fingers stay well clear.
- Don't stand in line of possible kickbacks.
- Use chip extraction if you can to reduce dust levels.
- Beware of the knives – they are really sharp when new or just sharpened.
- Make sure that the knives are properly located and secured when replacing them. Make sure that they clear the tables, fences, guards, and shrouds before switching on.
- If your machine doesn't have a magnetic starter make doubly sure the power is off before changing a setup.
- Use eye protection when planing, as chips can fly up. Also, ear protection should be worn as noise levels can be high.

The most important safety device rests between your ears – use it!