



Perennial Problems

By Janet L. Keyes, MS, CIH and Carol A. Keyes, MA, CSP

“It’s not painting – it’s priming. My sales rep said I could do it. I only use the 3-ounce paint cups. I don’t have much of a beard...and it’s only for hunting season. The cord is there only because there’s no outlet there. We have to keep that door locked because this is a bad neighborhood. I’m not doing anything that’s an eye hazard right now....”

Fantasy and falsehoods, all of them. We spend a lot of time trying to debunk these. Let’s try one more time:

Don’t spray outside of your booth

If you’re routinely spraying a flammable material – paint, primer, poly – you can’t do it in the middle of the shop. It doesn’t matter that the EPA has said it’s okay if the paint cups are three ounces or less. OSHA and Fire Code regulations say you can’t. Those regulators don’t care if you use an aerosol can once in a while. But if you’re doing it every week, you’re creating a fire and health risk for your employees.

If you really want to spray in the middle of your shop, you can make that into a spray area. Get rid of all electrical equipment (outlets, lighting) within twenty feet. Add ventilation. Get rid of any hot surfaces. Install sprinklers. Don’t allow any welding or grinding nearby. Not practical to do all that? Then use your spray booth.

Painters need to shave – and not just for fit-testing

If your painters need to wear tight-fitting respirators, they need to wear them correctly all the time. Beards interfere with the fit. OSHA explicitly states that “the employer shall not permit respirators with tight-fitting facepieces to be worn by employees who have facial hair that comes between the sealing surface of the facepiece and the face.”

It doesn’t matter if your painter can pass a fit test with that beard. It doesn’t matter that he shaved earlier in the week. If he has facial hair where the respirator seals to the face, you’re in violation of that OSHA standard. As the employer, you are responsible for enforcing the safety rules. Don’t want to lose a good painter to facial hair? Buy him a loose-fitting powered air purifying respirator or install an airline system, and make sure he uses it.

Extension cords aren’t permanent

Damaging an extension cord is a lot easier than damaging permanent wiring. Because of that, extension cords are only for temporary use. If you can’t unplug it and put it away each day, it probably isn’t temporary use. Have an electrician install outlets, instead. Or rearrange your shop so you don’t need the extension cord.

You can use extension cords for portable tools. But you need to make sure they're designed for hard service (round cords) and in good condition. If they're damaged, get rid of them. Don't wrap them with electrical tape as that doesn't provide the same protection as the original cord jacket.

You can lock the door – from the outside

If your shop catches on fire and people need to get out quickly, they'll run for the exit. But if the exit requires fumbling with a deadbolt or, worse, removing a 2x4 across the door, the fire might catch up to them. Rules for exits came about because of tragedies – too many cases where people were not able to evacuate quickly enough. You might think that it's simple to turn the knob and turn the deadbolt. If you're panicking because the fire is at your heels, you aren't stopping to think. You need to get out now.



It's a good idea to keep doors secured against uninvited visitors. But the way to do that is by installing panic bars or latches that unlock when turned from the inside.

Safety glass use is easier to enforce if everyone wears them

It isn't hard to establish a blanket "safety glasses all the time" rule. Lots of places do that. And if you do that, you won't have to argue with employees about whether they just took their safety glasses off for a minute, or didn't think they needed them when sanding, or would have used them when blowing off dust but couldn't find them.

Safety glasses don't prevent all eye injuries. They don't do a very good job in dusty conditions. A splash of wheel brightener can easily get past the lens and into your eyes. But they will keep that metal shard from penetrating into your eyeball.

I can hear you now: I'm only walking through the shop. Even if you want to serve as a bad example, going bare-eyed is hazardous. Getting a quick look at a welding flash isn't that bad if you're wearing polycarbonate safety glasses. If you aren't, hours later your eyes may feel like someone threw burning sand into them. And if a grinding wheel explodes or a wire brush sends out wires and you're in the wrong spot, your eyes will suffer.

Most technicians got into the habit of wearing safety glasses when they were in school. They can get back into the habit.

Make these perennial problems part of your past. Spray in the booth. Painters: shave. Use extension cords for temporary power only. Make sure people can escape tragedies. And wear your safety glasses. Stay safe out there.

This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com

This article originally appeared in *AASP News* (January 2018).