



Rutgers Environmental Health and Safety



Home Improvement Safety

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Working around the house can be dangerous if you don't use the same good work practices and personal protective equipment that you use at work. According to the National Safety Council, two-thirds of all disabling injuries suffered by Americans occurred off-the-job.

The following are a few tips that will help you use tools and materials safely on your next home improvement project:

General Safety Suggestions

- Use personal protective equipment (PPE), when appropriate. For example:
 - Safety glasses with side shields should be used when using power tools, when there is a potential for flying objects, when using compressed air or a blower, and when working overhead.
 - Safety goggles should be used when using chemicals or if there is a splash hazard.
 - Ear plugs should be used when using loud equipment or working in confined areas.
 - Gloves should be used when handling chemicals, working with lumber or metal, cleaning up debris, etc.
 - Respirators may be used in dusty en-



vironments or when using chemicals. It is important that you are physically able to wear a respirator, the correct respirator is being used, and you have a proper fit.

- Maintain your work area. Poor house-keeping may cause trips/falls or pose other safety hazards (i.e. falling items

or striking against materials). Clean your work area as you go to prevent build up of debris.

- Keep hazardous materials and tools out of reach of children.
- Ensure adequate lighting.
- Do not operate any fuel burning equipment indoors. This can pose a carbon monoxide hazard.
- Use ladders properly. Ensure that the ladder is in good condition and is set up correctly, including the following:
 - Ensure spreaders are locked on step ladders.
 - Do not stand on top steps of ladders.
 - Make sure the ladder is about 1 foot away from the vertical support for every 4 feet of ladder height.
 - Do not try reaching so far that you lose your balance; move the ladder.
 - Do not use metal or wet wooden ladders when working on or near electricity.
 - Ensure the ladder is placed on level ground, use cleats.

Chemical Use

- Read all instruction and follow manufacturer's recommendation when using chemicals.
- Work in well ventilated areas or outside.
- Properly dispose of oily rags. Dry out rags by spreading them in a well-ventilated area so heat can escape, then wash or dispose. Never put oily rags in a pile because they can ignite spontaneously. Store in a labeled,



metal container, sealed with a tight lid.

- Store gasoline in an outdoor shed or garage, out of children's reach,

and in an approved container. Gasoline must never be used indoors because a spark can ignite flammable vapors.

Power Tool Use

- Maintain power tools in good condition. Inspect tools before each use, ensure that all guards are in place, and ensure that electrical cords are in good condition.
- Read manufacturer's instruction prior to use of new tools.
- Do not wear any loose clothing or jewelry when using power tools because they can become caught in moving parts.
- Unplug the power cord before you perform trouble-shooting on a tool that is jammed or won't start, and never walk away from a plugged-in-power tool, even for a few minutes.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (i.e. safety glasses, ear plugs, etc.) when using power tools.



Electrical Safety

- Use Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI) when working outdoors or in wet locations.
- Turn off the power at the breaker before performing any electrical work (i.e. changing switches, outlets or light fixtures).
- Use heavy-duty extension cords (listed by Underwriters Laboratories (UL) for outdoor use) for tools such as trimmers and edgers.
- Ensure power tools are properly grounded unless tool is double-insulated.

