

Stained Glass Safety Notes

Keep Sharp

Most glass cuts result from not paying enough attention to what you're doing. Razor sharp edges can slice like a scalpel, and thin slivered shards will impale like a spear. It's important to always be aware of the potential for serious damage when you work with glass. Complacency causes more injuries than anything else. Keep yourself sharp – always pay attention to what you're doing

Safety Glasses

Always wear safety glasses when cutting or grinding glass. You can buy expensive glasses, or cheap ones – any kind is better than nothing as long as you do wear them. Cheap safety glasses work fine. They just won't last as long as the more expensive brands. Whatever kind you choose, it's a smart idea to get ones that have a bottom that sits against your cheek. When you break glass or grind it, shards can fly up, hit your cheek just under your glasses, bounce off the inside of the glasses, and go straight into your eye. This happens often while grinding, when the glass bits can shoot out fast enough to imbed firmly into your eye.

Lead Poisoning

This is serious, but not near as much as has been publicized or as many people have come to believe. Fear of lead contamination has been fueled with an irrational paranoia that is often unsupported by scientific evidence.

Lead will NOT absorb through the pores of your skin. Soldering lead will NOT produce particles you can inhale. There is a risk when cutting lead with power saws, or when repairing leaded glass. Fine particles of lead produced by the saw, or when you scrape old lead, can easily be inhaled. Always wear a protective mask when doing either of these.

The most common way to get lead poisoning is by ingesting it. Protecting yourself is simple. Don't eat it, always wash your hands after working with it, and don't drop it on your foot. For peace of mind, have regular blood and hair analysis tests done to monitor the amount of lead in your body.

Flux Fumes

If there has been too much fear about lead poisoning, there has been too little about potential harm from flux fumes. Vaporized flux is both poisonous and corrosive. It isn't enough to just have a fan blow the fumes away from you where you're working. This just circulates the fumes around the workplace so you can inhale them later. It's important to remove flux fumes entirely from where you work. Several small "fume traps" are available that vacuum the fumes and send them through a filter. To some varying degrees they all work. An inexpensive and more effective protection is to extract the fumes entirely with a ventilation system. This can be as simple as a cheap kitchen range hood over your work table that vents the fumes to outside. You can help protect the environment with a HEPA filter on the line venting to outside.

To effectively exhaust flux fumes, you want to create a steady air flow that draws the fumes away from you. It's better to draw the fumes away from in front of you than to push them from behind you. A large fan moving slowly works better than small one moving quickly.

Dust

Dust is a serious hazard often ignored or overlooked when working with glass. Dust from whiting compound, or the fine particles of glass from grinding can be inhaled. When you clean up glass dust, or whenever you work with whiting, you should wear a dust mask. It can be as simple and inexpensive as a disposable drywall mask - but you should use one. When wiping up glass dust, do it with a wet sponge or cloth. Don't sweep or vacuum it.

If inhaled, glass dust can cause serious and permanent damage to your lungs. You can't just go to the hospital and have it removed. Once you breath glass dust in, like asbestos, it's there forever. Protect your lungs – wear a dust mask.

Soldering Irons

A soldering iron hot enough to melt lead is more than hot enough to burn through flesh. Always be careful when handling a hot iron.