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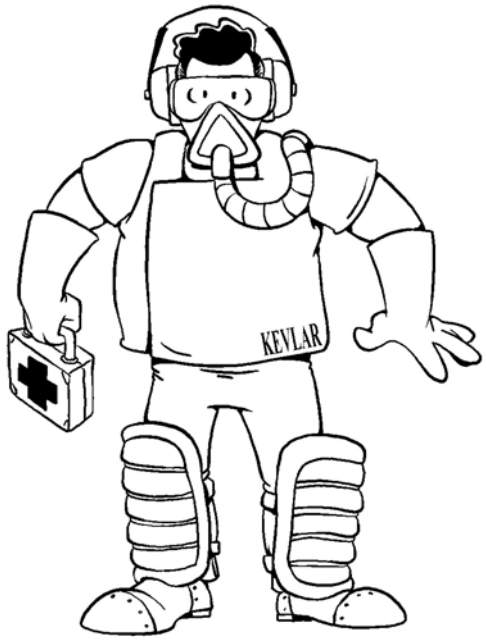
Super Safe or Safety Silly?



Promoting safety is admirable but there are some overzealous safety advocates that propose such needlessly extreme and rigid safety "rules", their warnings often scare people away entirely or, more importantly, cause people to question the credibility and validity of many safety precautions that should be taken seriously.

Some such warnings are more fearmongering than safety alert and should be addressed with a bit of common sense practicality. Here are a few examples of warnings that go well past super safe to safety silly:

Never use an extension cord on a kiln

If the wire used is of sufficient size, an extension cord can be put on anything. You can get industrial extension cords for as much as 100 amps.

Never fire your kiln unattended

Unless you have foolishly installed your kiln too close to something combustible, there's no reason to be concerned about what might happen. Kilns are specifically designed to tolerate high heat for extended periods. If your kiln fires up its highest possible temperature and stays there for many hours, all that will happen is you'll use up a lot of electricity until you turn it off. If you bought a kiln with a digital controller, use the controller for what it was intended – to eliminate the need to babysit your kiln.

Don't run a 15 amp kiln on a 15 amp breaker

If the kiln draws too much power for a 15 amp circuit it will trip the 15 amp breaker and disconnect the electricity. If you keep trying to draw too much power, all that will happen is you'll keep tripping the breaker. That's what the breaker is for.

Exhaust vent fans must be minimum 125 cfm for every sq ft of hood area

Fumes from torching or soldering can be nasty but neither soldering with a small electrical iron or torchworking with a small tabletop torch are in the category of biohazards that require a perfectly sealed controlled flow chamber or industrial capacity fume exhaust. The objective is to have fans big enough to remove the fumes – not big enough to vacuum inhale your tools. There are lots of ways to make sure you are safely removing noxious fumes without resorting to monster industrial capacity fans.

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Propane tanks must never be inside

In many places it's prohibited and having propane tanks inside will void insurance coverage, but in some places it's a perfectly legal, perfectly acceptable and relatively common practice. Propane cylinders have been used inside buildings by thousands of people in thousands of places for dozens of years. Safety in handling propane tanks depends more on how you handle them than where they are installed.

Flashback arrestors must always be used with torches

These are not needed on surface mix torches. Using one on a surface mix torch is a waste of money to buy and a waste of time to install.

Handling lead will cause lead poisoning

Few safety considerations are affected by more nonsense irrational fearmongering than lead poisoning. You can get lead poisoning but not by handling it and not by soldering it. You only get lead poisoning by ingesting lead. It will NOT get into your body by absorbing through the pores of your skin and it will NOT form fumes you can inhale while soldering. If you are concerned about any possible harm from working with lead, just follow 2 simple rules:

- **Don't eat it.**
- **Don't drop it on your foot.**

Safety Margins & Credibility Concerns

Many artisans have become so concerned about safety that it may be needlessly restricting many of their activities. The glass manufacturers provide schedules for firing glass in a kiln that any simple test will demonstrate are needlessly conservative. I've learned that if a suggested ramp speed of 200 degrees per hour is called for, it's fairly common to be able to safely ramp at 400 degrees per hour without producing thermal shock. If a ramping speed fails to cause thermal shock, that ramp speed is perfectly safe. If it's safe to drive at 60 mph, why slow down to 30 mph?

Needlessly excessive safety allowance creates a credibility concern. If you repeatedly see that speeds are posted at 30, but you know that it's safe to drive at 60, wouldn't it be reasonable to assume that it's always safe to drive at twice the posted speeds? If they are that far off on ramping speed requirements, why would we not suspect they are equally far off on annealing times? I know I can safely ramp at twice the usual recommended speeds and prove it with every firing I do. Why would I not mistakenly assume it's equally safe to alter the recommended annealing times by an equivalent allowance?

People that exaggerate safety concerns may be well-intentioned but they may also be doing more harm than good if their exaggerations cause people to doubt all safety warnings.

It's a good safety practice to wear a safety belt but you don't need a NASCAR standard roll cage, crash helmet and fire suit for driving to the supermarket.