

Safety Tips for Do-It-Yourselfers

Whereas jobs around the home used to be left largely to professionals, these days the do-it-yourself approach to home improvement is getting more and more popular. Not coincidentally, that leads to large numbers of accidents each year. In a 2004 study, the Home Safety Council (HSC) found that unintentional home injuries accounted for nearly 20,000 deaths and 21 million trips to the doctor.

While not all of those accidents are preventable, a large number are. A do-it-yourself project can be very enjoyable and rewarding, but proper precautions must be taken to avoid injury, hospitalization or possibly something worse.

Take Care of Your Back

A significant portion of injuries "on the job" affect the back. While each injury and individual is different, a number of these injuries occur when people who are relatively sedentary at work all week attempt to lift too much or work too hard come the weekend. If you sit at a desk most of the week, take extra precaution with your back.

- **Movement:** When you need to transport heavy items, don't do so merely by picking them up. Use the tools the professionals use, such as a wheel barrel or a hand truck. If your property is especially large and the wheelbarrow is not an option, consider transporting materials in the trunk of your car or in the bed of a pickup truck if you have one.

- **Lift properly:** Keep your back straight and your legs bent whenever lifting any material, light or heavy.

- **Carry correctly:** If you must carry items, do so in a way that's least harmful to your back. Oftentimes, this means keeping materials waist high and centered between your legs.

Keep Your Skin Safe

One of the more painful things that can happen on a home-improvement job is exposure to caustic chemicals. Again, professionals always exercise extreme caution when working with chemicals, and so should you.

Avoid direct contact with skin whenever possible. For example, ongoing contact between skin and fresh concrete can be dangerous, leading to skin

irritation and possible burns. Avoid touching your eyes and even your clothes, as you might forget you rubbed off some chemicals on your clothes and then use your shirt to wipe off sweat.

Sand and aggregate can be abrasive to your skin as well. Because exposure to just about any chemical is bad for your skin, always wear correct clothing such as long sleeve shirts, long pants and waterproof gloves. Even if a chemical appears harmless, the chances it will rub off someplace else, such as in your eyes or on the kids, are great enough that extreme caution needs to be practiced at all times.

Protect Your Eyes

One of the worst things that can happen on a home-improvement project is damage to your eyes. Whether you're welding, laying cement or working on a rooftop, eye damage leaves you more vulnerable than perhaps any other injury. That's because once your eyes have been contaminated, you've immediately lost the valuable asset of sight.

For instance, working on a rooftop is dangerous to begin with. However, should something get into your eye while at a high elevation, your risk of injury greatly increases. Just because you might not be working with chemicals on the roof doesn't mean accumulated dust and dirt on the rooftop can't find their way into your eye with a strong gust of wind. So whenever you're doing a home improvement project, make sure you're wearing eye protection. Regular sunglasses won't do the trick; try to use safety goggles with UV protection. That way your eyes are safe from both debris and sun while you work.

All do-it-yourselfers should realize the potential dangers involved with doing your own home improvements. Whenever you're planning a job, always remember safety comes first for the professionals, and it should for you as well.



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