

Don't Die When You Dye!

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"Safety should be your first concern."

Yeah, that's what we've all heard...("Famous Last Words?") Gone are the good ol' days when you used to spray MEK dye on the carpet of a van with the doors closed. Or how about the times when you did those intricate repairs with a cigarette hanging half out of your mouth and the only concern was keeping the smoke out of your eyes? I've had people tell me that it was safer to smoke while doing vinyl repair because the cigarette has an air filter on it (don't try this at home, kids).

Well, for some of us those days are gone, but there is still a lot to be concerned about. I am constantly surprised to see how many people are quite careless with their health and safety when it comes to this industry. At our last training class I asked for a show of hands of the people that wore a mask while working and not a single person raised their hand. (I hope all of you are shifting uncomfortably in your seats right about now.)

Let's start with some basic concepts:



If your hand touches a chemical it should be gloved

I buy box after box of latex exam gloves (although I don't refrigerate them like my doctor seems to). The cost of gloves is very reasonable and they should be changed often throughout the workday. These gloves are a simple yet effective measure in preventing unneeded exposure to toxic chemicals that enter your body through skin absorption.

What you spray will be inhaled

Wearing respiratory protection should be as automatic as such basic safety concepts such as "don't stare at the sun". Ever see ol' timers hacking up a kidney? It's not a pretty sight. When first working in aesthetic repair and being over-exposed to DNA-altering substances, I'd hack up stuff with veins in it on some days.

However, wearing a mask has a hidden danger: wearing a mask improperly can be even more dangerous than not wearing one. It is important to select the correct mask for the particular type of contaminant. A mask that is worn improperly or in the wrong conditions may become more dangerous since the wearer may not avoid exposure or breathing harmful elements because they believe they are protected. I found a great web site that helps you chose the proper type of mask for the particular contaminant at www.northsafety.com . It has a section called "EZguide" where you select the chemical and it



matches the proper filter to use and it even offers the same guide for hand protection.

What about vinyl repair compounds?

Vinyl repair compounds are what's called plastisols, which are a mixture of PVC and plasticizers. PVC, according to some experts, can be extremely toxic - especially when heated. According to these experts, when PVC items are caught in a building fire, PVC releases a toxic hydrogen chloride gas that forms hydrochloric acid. This may prove deadly if inhaled by firefighters and/or building occupants. Firefighters face frequent harmful occupational exposures when battling fires laden with PVC building materials and consumer products. Building occupants may even be killed from inhaling toxic PVC fumes before they are able to escape.



This means that when we are curing vinyl repair compounds using heat, this is probably not the best time to practice our Zen deep breathing exercises, since the gases escaping during the process are probably not very good for you. When working with PVC and heat, make sure that you are in a well-ventilated area and avoid breathing any of the fumes generated when curing the compound. A really important fact to remember is that even if you are being smart and wearing a mask, make sure that it is the proper type or just hold your breath.

Crosslinkers present a serious issue as well. Crosslinkers are catalyst compounds that make resins turn into an irreversible molecular alignment. This process is technically known as polymerization or commonly referred to as being "crosslinked". Some crosslinkers in past years have been known to be quite toxic. In fact, at one of our training seminars there was a gentleman who reported that he experienced severe respiratory distress whenever he refinished leather inside a vehicle. It didn't take long to figure out that his body had become sensitized, or allergic to his crosslinker. Once he changed to a different, less toxic, crosslinker his symptoms disappeared.

We encourage all manufacturers of products to carry accurate MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets for those in Rio Linda) and supply them to their customers. In the end, we are all responsible for our own health; it's ultimately up to you to protect yourself properly. Let's make sure that we treat our body as a temple, not a toxic waste site!