

General Thoughts About Health & Safety

Common Sense Each individual has unique sensitivities, and must take responsibility for his or her well being. Sore eyes, nausea, skin rashes, and similar discomforts can be signs that whatever you are doing disagrees with you. If the condition persists, try to systematically isolate what you are doing. This could be a reaction to an art material, or to something you ate, a local pollutant, or any number of things.

Ventilation Not everything that smells bad is unhealthy, and not everything that is bad for you smells. Rather than using just your nose, look for dizziness, dry mouth, and headaches as signs of reduced air quality. Whenever possible, provide a fresh supply of air. Usually very little is required to create an air flow that will drive fumes away as they are replaced with fresh air. The goal is to create a draft, and this can often be done simply by opening windows on opposite sides of the room. A small fan used to push fresh air in might be enough to push the bad air out. To test this, roll up a piece of paper, light it, then blow it out. Watch the trail of smoke to see where it goes, and adjust as needed.

Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs) Repeated small motions can cause numbness, tingling, and pain in some people. To avoid them, pause periodically to shake out your hands. Arrange your work table and seating to minimize abrupt angles in your posture. There are many simple exercises available to reduce the risk of RSIs.

Clothing Wear some. When working around open flames (and this will include soldering, lampworking, and cooking on the barbecue), avoid synthetic fabrics. If they burn, they melt and stick. Strong chemicals, both acidic and basic, require rubber gloves, and even simple low risk chemicals are nicer to handle with latex gloves. These are available in bulk from drug stores, and worth having on hand (literally).

Power Tools Drills, sanders, grinders, and similar tools change otherwise harmless activities into potential hazards because of increased speed. Wear goggles and in many cases, a respirator. For common dusts, a disposable paper mask might be sufficient. As above, stay alert to signs from your body to determine if a more aggressive respirator or ventilation system is needed. Whenever using power equipment, avoid loose clothing and keep long hair tied back.

We are what we eat... Which is a reminder to wash your hands before picking up your sandwich. In general, avoid eating in an art studio or workshop.

PMC in Particular The binder in PMC is proven to be nontoxic and most people have no problems with any phase of its process. A few people have reported a skin rash from contact, or headaches from the fumes of firing. If you are one of these people, devise systems to avoid these situations. For instance, use gloves or a barrier skin cream for contact problems, or a fan for fumes; in some situations it may be possible to locate the kiln outside of the classroom. There is no danger of serious illness but be creative in your arrangements to minimize discomfort.

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