Got DIY Projects on Your List This Spring? Don’t Forget Safety

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Spring has finally sprung, pushing many of us outside to work in yards and on home improvements. If you've been a couch potato all winter, be sure to take it slowly and warm up before toiling for hours. Your body might need a little time to get used to all the activity.

Before starting any do-it-yourself project, research it thoroughly. Read the labels on all project materials you buy, and pay special attention to the safety directions. Reacquaint yourself with the proper use of your tools before each project.

Of course, you should always have a fully stocked first-aid kit on hand to deal with occasional mishaps. And if you’re headed outdoors, don't forget drinking water and sunscreen!

Here are some other tips that can help you stay safe and healthy as you make the most of spring:

Dress with safety in mind. The thing about DIY accidents is that it's often the small things that end up hurting you. You might know to be careful around electricity, saws, riding lawnmowers, and other obviously dangerous stuff, but what about your jewelry or long sleeves? If you're around anything that spins (like a table saw or power drill), dangling sleeves, jewelry, and even long hair can get caught up and pull you toward danger.

If you’ll be working with hazardous materials like glass or spray paint, wear protective clothing like safety glasses, gloves, and a dust mask. Wearing shorts or going barefoot in areas where things get hot or break can lead to problems. The lesson here is to dress right for the task and take your wardrobe seriously.

Wear quality safety glasses. You may not think a quick trip around the yard with a weed whacker justifies the use of safety glasses, but airborne particles can and do cause eye injuries. Invest in tight-fitting protective eyewear that conforms to the contours of your face. Get into the habit of putting on protective glasses whenever there's even a small chance of flying dust.

Wear a dust mask or respirator. Just because you're covering your mouth and nose with a mask of some sort doesn't necessarily mean you have all the protection you need. Some respirators are designed to filter out particles in the air, while others will protect you from harmful fumes. No single respirator will protect you from all possible threats.
Before you start your project, check for reference information about respirators on the packaging of materials and tools you'll be using. Add the right protection to your shopping cart.

**Clear the air.** If you’re painting or using any material that creates toxic fumes or dust, keep the area well ventilated. Never smoke while painting or standing close to a freshly painted area.

**Respect ladders.** Ladders are one of the main causes of DIY accidents. When you use one, keep reminding yourself that heights are dangerous. Be careful and observant at all times. Set up your ladder on a stable, level surface, and lock A-frame ladders into position. Lean ladders against vertical surfaces with a 1-foot spread at the base for every 4 feet of height.

Never step on the top two rungs of a ladder or use a ladder near utility poles or around electrical wires. Don’t work on a ladder outside when it’s stormy, and NEVER when there’s lightning.

**Avoid chainsaw kickbacks.** Chainsaws are effective tree trimmers, but they can be dangerous, too. The U.S. Consumer Protection Safety Commission has issued a warning about old-style chainsaws. The commission recommends replacing the chain to reduce the chance of kickback that can occur when the nose-end of the guide bar encounters an obstruction.

**Be careful around electricity.** The electrical current in your home is powerful enough to kill you. And even though you may know this in theory, it's easy to make a stupid mistake -- with tragic results. Keep these electrical safety tips in mind:

- When fixing or checking electrical appliances or connections, always switch off the power and remove the fuse or circuit breaker. If you’re fixing an electrical appliance, pull the plug.
- Never use water to put out a fire in an electrical appliance. Keep a multipurpose fire extinguisher on hand that can handle flammable liquids like grease and oil, as well as electrical equipment. It’ll be rated for Classes A-B-C.
- Use a voltage meter to make sure whatever you're planning to repair isn't getting any electrical current.
- Never perform electrical work when standing on an aluminum ladder.
- When working with electricity, wear rubber-soled shoes or work on a rubber mat.
- Don't use tools in damp conditions unless they're connected to a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI).
- Never bypass the on/off switch of a piece of equipment by plugging and unplugging the cord instead.
- Never use tools with frayed cords or disabled guards.

If all this sounds scary to you, consider hiring a professional instead of performing those DIY projects yourself. Not everyone is handy, and like they say, it's better to be safe than sorry.

For more good safety information, visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission website at [www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Guides](http://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Guides)

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