

Controlling The Dangers Of Compressed Air

There are two concerns in safety when using compressed air. (Flying objects and the air itself) Horseplay has been a cause of some serious workplace accidents caused by individuals not aware of the hazards of compressed air. Some television shows have shown bad examples on the use of compressed air.

Compressed air is extremely forceful. Depending on its pressure, compressed air can dislodge particles. These particles are a danger since they can enter your eyes or possibly the skin. The potential damage would depend on the size, weight, shape, composition, and speed of the particles. There have also been reports of hearing damage caused by the pressure of compressed air and by its sound caused by the nozzle.

Compressed air itself is also a serious hazard. On rare occasions, some of the compressed air can enter the blood stream through a break in the skin or through a body opening. An air bubble in the blood stream is known medically as an embolism, a dangerous medical condition in which a blood vessel is blocked, in this case, by an air bubble. An embolism of an artery can cause coma, paralysis or death. While air embolisms are usually associated with incorrect diving procedures, they are possible with compressed air due to high pressures. The consequences of even a small quantity of air or other gas in the blood can quickly be fatal.

Although many people know using compressed air to clean debris or clothes can be hazardous, it is still used because of old habits and the easy availability of compressed air in many workplaces. Cleaning objects, machinery, bench tops, clothing and other things with compressed air is dangerous. Injuries can be caused by the air jet and by particles made airborne.

When compressed air cleaning is unavoidable, hazards can be reduced. Use the lowest air pressure that is still effective to handle the task. A "quiet" nozzle should be selected. Personal protection equipment must be worn to protect the worker's body, especially the eyes, against particles and dust under pressure. Air guns should also be used with some local exhaust ventilation or facilities to control the generation of airborne particulates. The use of chip guards can deflect flying dust or debris, extension tubes will give the worker a safer working distance, or even air guns equipped with injection exhausts and particle collection bags are other options to consider in compressed air safety.

About the Author

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