



IT'S YOUR HEALTH



Safe Use of Arts and Crafts Materials

The Issue

If you are an artist or crafts person, you may be working with materials that have the potential to harm your health. It is important to protect yourself by taking proper precautions, whether you are working with these materials to earn money or simply for your own enjoyment.

Background

Some artists and crafts people might assume that all arts materials are safe to work with, based on the simple fact that the materials are readily available. However, some of these materials can pose a hazard if you do not follow all of the safety instructions on the product label.

It is impossible to list all of the potential hazards associated with every arts and crafts material. However, the following examples highlight some things that could be harmful:

- If you draw or paint, you might inhale dust from dry pigments or fumes from the chemical solvents used to clean brushes. Spray paints can produce mists that are harmful when inhaled. Many of these products are also flammable.

- Some photo-processing solutions used in developers, fixers, stop baths and intensifiers can irritate skin, be poisonous if ingested and may produce dangerous fumes.
- In jewellery-making and enamelling, you could inhale dusts or fumes during soldering, pickling, casting or finishing.
- In stained glass work, you could inhale lead fumes when soldering glass pieces together or you could be exposed to lead when handling lead came or leaded solders. You could also inhale hazardous fumes when using acid fluxes during soldering, or do serious damage to your lungs by breathing in powdered glass when using an electric glass grinder.
- In woodworking, you could seriously damage your lungs by inhaling wood dust over and over again. Some of the solvents and adhesives used in stripping, gluing and finishing can also harm your health.
- Some materials that are safe when used on their own can produce hazardous fumes or materials when they are mixed with bleaches, acids, solvents, household cleaners or other substances.

Potential Health Effects

Some arts materials can cause chemical burns or illness if you spill them on your skin, get them in your eyes, or breathe or swallow even a bit of them just once. Repeated exposure to small amounts of certain materials can cause a variety of health problems, and prolonged exposure to some substances could damage your internal organs.

Anyone working with hazardous materials should take precautions. This advice is even more important for pregnant women, and anyone who takes medication or has a medical condition. Remember too that the effects of poisons are more serious for young children than for adults. Young children are also more likely to be exposed to hazardous arts and crafts materials because they are curious and have a natural habit of putting things into their mouths.

Minimizing Your Risk

To protect yourself from potential health problems, learn all you can about the materials and techniques you are using. Look for safer alternatives, and do not try anything new until you have looked into the potential hazards. Take classes, ask an experienced professional, call the manufacturer's toll-free number, which is usually on the product label or package, or go to the library.

In addition, follow these safety guidelines:

- Read the safety instructions on your arts materials every time you go to use them. Follow the instructions to the letter.
- Keep materials in their original containers whenever possible. If you transfer materials, make sure

you put labels on the new containers. Keep the original container nearby.

- Avoid working near food preparation areas, and store all materials away from food and drink. Do not eat, drink, smoke or apply make-up in your work area.
- Avoid wearing contact lenses when you work. They can trap dust or splashed liquids, which could damage your eyes.
- When using solvents, acids or materials that produce dusts, work with the smallest quantities possible.
- Avoid touching hands to your mouth with brushes or other materials or tools when working. Wash your hands after you finish working.
- Use a closed mixing box to control dust from powders, and clean up with a wet mop to avoid stirring up dust.
- Use proper ventilation. Depending on the materials you use, this could mean bringing in fresh air, or using a fan to draw fumes away from you. For some hazardous procedures, you may need to use a laboratory hood or a spray booth.
- Make sure you have a source of running water near your work area.
- Install a smoke detector in your work area and keep a fire extinguisher close at hand.
- Use protective equipment, including:
 - goggles to protect your eyes from splashes or flying splinters
 - ear plugs to protect against loud or continuous noises

- rubberized gloves to avoid getting solvents or acids on your skin (Ordinary household rubber gloves may not provide enough protection against certain hazardous materials.)
- dust masks or respirators to prevent breathing in dusts and fumes.
- Do not allow children or pets into your work area unless they are carefully supervised.
- Keep your work place neat. If you do not have a permanent work place that you can lock up, put away any hazardous materials when you are not working.
- Store hazardous materials out of sight and out of the reach of children and pets. Do not store hazardous materials in a refrigerator used for food or drinks.
- Keep the phone number of your nearest Poison Control Centre handy so you can call right away for advice if there is an emergency.
- Contact your municipal waste facility for information on safe disposal of any hazardous waste materials.

Finally, if you suffer headaches, dizzy spells, severe mood swings or other symptoms of illness while you are working, leave the project for a while to see if you feel better. These symptoms could be warning signs that you need to take additional steps to protect your health when working with arts and crafts materials. If symptoms persist or return while you are away from the work areas, seek medical advice.



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Health Canada's Role

Health Canada's Product Safety Program ensures that consumers are made aware of the information they need to use chemical products safely for their intended purpose. As part of this work, Health Canada sets out the criteria manufacturers must follow when they classify, label and package their products. These criteria take into consideration the hazards associated with products and the potential risks of using products. Health Canada also investigates consumer complaints about the safety of products and has the authority to take products off the market when necessary for safety reasons.

Need More Info?

Contact:
Consumer Product Safety,
Health Canada
MacDonald Building, 4th Floor
123 Slater Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0K9
Tel: (613) 957-4467
E-mail: CPS-SPC@hc-sc.gc.ca

Health Canada's Consumer Product Safety Web section at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/index_e.html

Also, see the following:

Health Canada's Lead Information Package, at:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/asked_questions-questions_posees_e.html

It's Your Health, Lead-based Paint, at:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/prod/paint-peinture_e.html

(This article explains how to minimize the risk of exposure to lead-based paint, which may have been used in older homes.)

Child and Family Canada, Safety in the Arts fact sheet at:

www.cfc-efc.ca/docs/cccf/rs021_en.htm

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the It's Your Health Web site at:

www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at

1-866-225-0709

or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*