

SAFE DIY

SKILL LEVEL



SAFETY FIRST

Whenever you are carrying out DIY, your working practices don't only affect you - they could also affect the safety of anyone else nearby.

INTRODUCTION

If a job is worth doing at all, it's worth doing safely.

Safety should always be a top priority for anyone who is involved in DIY. Many of the hundreds of accidents that happen each day in the home or garden could be easily avoided with a little thought. However experienced you are, it always pays to take time to plan your work, and to think about any safety issues before you start.

Ultimately, the success of any DIY project can be affected by the attitude you have to safety. Let safety be the first thing you think of before starting a job, and the last thing you think of when finishing it - so that it becomes an integral part of everything you do. This leaflet contains a wealth of suggestions that will help you to think about safety, and to practise it.

2 - Be prepared

Preparation and planning are key elements of good safety practice. They not only help to keep you safe - they can also save both time and money.

Before starting a job, be realistic about how long it will take. Have regular breaks to avoid tiredness or loss of concentration. If it takes longer than you expected, don't start cutting corners or speeding up - take your time and make sure the job is done properly.

Avoid loose clothing, tie back long hair (or tuck it under a hat), and remove any loose jewellery, including earrings, necklaces, bracelets and watches.

Before you start any plumbing work, check the location and condition of items such as stopcocks and gate valves. Ensure that they can be quickly opened or shut in the event of an emergency.



It may seem obvious, but always read through any instruction leaflets beforehand - especially if you are using an unfamiliar piece of equipment. Don't assume you know how it works - check it out first. Make sure you have a First Aid kit (with contents that are not past their 'sell by' date) and keep

it somewhere handy (1).

Switch off at the mains when working with electricity. Tape over any broken or unusable switches, and make sure that any broken items are replaced as soon as possible.

Make up a simple electricity repair kit for basic emergencies. This should contain a torch (with working batteries), rubber gloves, insulated pliers and screwdrivers, insulating tape, spare bulbs, fuses and fuse wire.

Don't be too proud to ask for help. If in doubt at any time, don't take risks - contact a professional.

3 - The tools of the trade

Always use the right tools for the project - don't be tempted to improvise! Don't use tools which have loose heads or handles. If you need to buy new tools, check the labels and opt for ones which are made to a British or European standard or which have an approved quality and safety mark.

Always read the instructions before use. Maintain all tools in a good, clean condition - especially electrical appliances.

Keep the cover guards on sharp tools when they are not being used. Use a toolbox with a tidy, so that everything is instantly at hand.



Don't forget to wear the correct protective clothing at all times - including strong shoes, gloves, eye and ear protection, safety helmet and dust masks etc (2).

4 - The ladder of success

Many DIY accidents are caused by the careless use of ladders or scaffolding. Always inform someone of what you are doing.

Use sensible shoes when working on ladders - not sandals or bare feet.

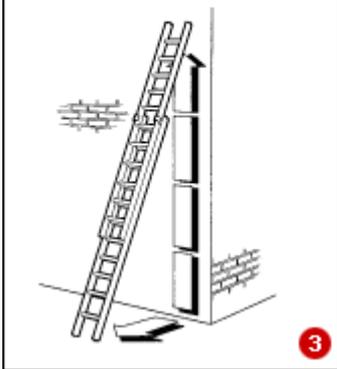
The bottom of the ladder (which should preferably have non-slip feet) should rest on a hard, level surface. Similarly, the top should rest against a solid surface. Don't prop it against glass, window sills or gutters - where necessary use a pre-fitted stand-off.

Many accidents are caused by slipping ladders, so secure both the bottom and top parts to something firm and strong with ropes or straps.

When you need to move the ladder, ask someone to help wherever possible. Always move or extend a ladder rather than risk overreaching.

Make sure your ladder is at a safe angle - the distance of the feet from the wall or vertical surface should be a quarter of the ladder's height. A 6m (20ft) ladder should therefore be 1.5m (5ft) away from the wall at the bottom (3).

Ladder against a wall showing relative distances



If you need to work on scaffolding, always ensure that it is erected on firm, level ground. Scaffolding with a 1.3m (4ft) square base should be tied to a building once the height exceeds 3.25m (11ft). Provide kick boards around the platform.

Always wear a helmet when working on scaffolding. Gloves are also recommended, although you may find them restrictive.

5 - Power to the people

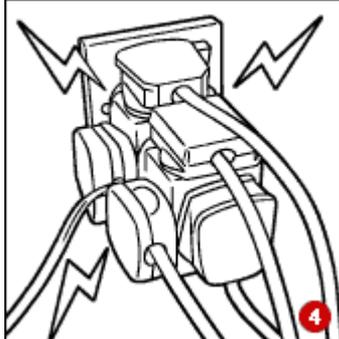
Electricity is a potential killer, and should be handled with care - if in doubt, call in an expert.

Water and electricity don't mix. Even if you're carrying out seemingly harmless tasks such as washing down walls, turn off the electricity first. Never use any electrical plugs, sockets or equipment which have been wet, unless you are sure that they have thoroughly dried out.

Extension cables often need to be uncoiled before use, or they could overheat - check the instructions. Make sure that it is safe to use the extension cable with an appliance before you start.

If you can't avoid working with electrical appliances in damp conditions, you should use a Residual Current Device or power breaker. This automatically cuts off the power supply in the case of an accident (such as a cut cable) or a malfunction.

An overloaded socket, with adaptors and plugs



Take care not to use too many plugs or adaptors with an electrical socket - it could overload (4). Where feasible, check that the connections inside each plug are tight, and that the cord grip is tight around the cable (rather than just the wires inside the cable).

All plugs should contain the correct fuse. If a fuse blows, switch off the power and unplug the appliance before trying to find the fault. If in doubt, ask an expert. The same principles apply to a mains fuse - use the correct thickness of fuse wire and switch off at the mains before checking a blown fuse.

Find the correct fuse rating by checking the manufacturer's recommendations, or from the recommended ratings that are often published on fuse packets or in good DIY books. Copy them onto a list, and keep it with your fuses.

Beware of damaged, kinked or frayed cables and flexes.

6 - It's a gas!

A wide variety of home appliances now run on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders. Although these are generally very safe, certain precautions should be taken.

Fit new cylinders in the open air. Never smoke or work near a naked flame when changing a cylinder. Remember that even electrical tools can give off sparks.

LPG appliances should only be used in well-ventilated areas. The gas is heavy and highly flammable, and will not easily disperse in the event of a leak. LPG has a distinctive smell - if you smell it, turn off the gas and ask an expert to check the appliance.



To check for leaks, apply soapy water over all connections - any leaks will be shown by bubbles. Hoses should also be checked regularly and replaced if they are cracked (5).

Spare LPG cylinders should be stored in a secure and well ventilated area outside the house, but not below ground

level.

ALL gas repairs must be carried out by a qualified and registered CORGI (Council Of Registered Gas Installers) engineer. To confirm whether a business is currently registered, ask your installer to show you a registration certificate.

7 - Out and about

A garden can be a surprisingly hazardous place in which to work. Electrical equipment such as mowers and hedge trimmers merit particular care. Always use a Residual Current Device or power breaker.

When using a mower or hedge trimmer, feed the cable over your shoulder, and always keep the appliance in front of the cable.

Never attempt to clean or adjust electrical tools whilst they are still plugged in. Switch off first, unplug, and clean by wiping with a cloth - do not wash the appliance!

When working in the garden, particularly with electrical equipment, always wear strong shoes or boots - never go barefoot.

Many injuries are caused by falls due to slippery or uneven paths, or broken concrete and crazy paving. Repair any damaged areas as soon as possible. Use rubber or plastic caps on bamboo canes, as the tops can cause eye injuries.

Wear the correct protective clothing - including eye protection - particularly if using a chainsaw or spraying chemicals.

If you are planning to use a chainsaw, make sure you know how to use it properly. Never climb a tree whilst holding one - and always work with a companion in case of accidents.

Ask an expert or your Local Authority if you need advice on handling potentially harmful materials such as asbestos or lead.



Barbecue firelighters being lit

Ensure that barbecues are located well away from fences, low trees or shrubs and sheds. Never use paraffin or petrol for lighting a bonfire - there are many suitable firelighters or starter fluids available (6). Keep children at a safe distance, don't wear loose, flapping clothing and tie long hair back.

Never spray a lighted barbecue with a flammable liquid, even a recommended starter fluid.

8 - Accidents can happen...

Even the most safety-conscious worker can sometimes have an accident. Here are some basic first aid tips.

If someone is injured, remove any continuing danger: for instance, turn off the electricity if appropriate. Then don't panic, but assess the seriousness of the situation as calmly as possible. Don't move the patient unless necessary. If in any doubt, call a doctor.

Small cuts and grazes should be cleaned up with soap and water - not antiseptic.

Don't give an injured person any food or drink (in case any anaesthetics need to be administered at a later stage). However, if you urgently need to dilute the effects of poisons or chemicals, give a drink of water, unless the patient's mouth is burnt.

Call the emergency services (999) in cases of unconsciousness; drowsiness or sickness; poisoning; severe bleeding or bleeding from the ear; bad burns; or intense pain.

Don't try to induce sickness - and never give the patient salty water.



Severe bleeding should be reduced by pressing a pad on the cut. A clean, folded handkerchief is ideal. If the cut still contains a large foreign body (such as a splintered stick or glass), press near the wound. Continue until the bleeding stops. If a limb is bleeding, raise it up, unless it's broken (7). For deep, wide or dirty cuts, or wounds containing a

foreign body, call a doctor.

Burns and scalds need hospital treatment unless they are very minor. Small burns should be held under running cold water for at least ten minutes. Because skin can swell, remove any belts or jewellery, but don't attempt to move any clothing that is stuck to the burn. To minimise the risk of infection, burns can be covered with a clean cloth (such as a large handkerchief or pillowcase) or clingfilm. Never use butter or oil on a burn - leave it untreated.

Consider taking a simple first aid course so that you are better prepared for any accidents.