

The Dangers of Compressed Air

Compressed air is very common, and possible dangers often go unnoticed or unknown. Injuries can be caused by the air jet or particles made airborne.

Air pressurized at just 12 psi can force an eye from its socket.

Air pressurized at just 40 psi can rupture an eardrum if it passes 4" or closer to the ear, causing permanent hearing loss or even a brain hemorrhage.

On rare occasions, some of the compressed air can enter the bloodstream through a break in the skin or through a body opening. The air bubble it creates is called an embolism. An embolism in an artery can cause coma, paralysis or death depending on its size, duration, and location.

To prevent injuries with compressed air:

1. Do not use it to blow away dirt or debris from your clothes.

If the pressure is strong enough to remove these particles, it will be strong enough to blow them into your eyes, ears, nose or even the skin.

It is far safer to just brush yourself off.

2. Wear safety glasses when using compressed air to clean equipment & floors.

Also wear them if you are in the area right by where someone else is cleaning up.

3. When cleaning with air, make sure it is not blowing debris onto others.

4. Avoid horseplay.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, in London, reports a serious case when employees in a carpenter shop were using compressed air hoses to remove sawdust from their clothing. One man was seen to push the hose between the legs of a fellow-worker from behind & the man sustained the following injuries:

Bruising & bleeding in the area of the rectum; Shock; Air through tissues over abdomen, chest and neck; Hernia canals in the groin ballooned with air; Lower bowel torn open in 3 places; Abdominal cavity filled with bowel material from lower bowel; and Lining of abdominal cavity torn in several places. The man was operated on and blood transfusions given, but he died three days after being injured.