

Safety, Part II

Safety Topic – Lathe Accidents and Near Misses

I feel the best teacher is experience from near misses and accidents of others. We can learn a lot to protect ourselves. At the November 2005 meeting of the Washington Woodworkers Guild, I reviewed some reported accidents. I found a site at WWA, Accident Search <http://69.64.173.24/Accidents/search.htm> that has useful information categorized by machine type.

Most lathe accidents were related to (1) improved lathe setup, (2) wood flying off the centers, and (3) hand/finger caught between tool-rest and wood. Most reports were submitted by novices/beginners. Apparently experience woodturners don't have any accidents (or perhaps too embarrassed to report them in a public forum). Here is a summary of some incidents – hope they will help you in understanding how to be safe. Clearly some of the safety rules mentioned by Don Riggs in their Nov 05 Newsletter apply.

- Person marked centers on wood, then mounted 4"x4" board, started up, and the board flew out of the lathe causing severe head injury – 18 stitches to upper lip, visit to the dentist, and plastic surgery. Learning: Wear face shield, and stand to side when starting for first time.
- Person finished turning a small piece of wood, reached over to sand it, and shirt sleeve caught on spurs of center. Fortunately it was a low powered lathe resulting in only a bruised wrist. Learning: watch loose clothing; ensure power off switch is easily accessible.
- Student put hand on a rotating piece resulting in a pinched palm and a chunk of skin out of the heel of the hand. Learning: Don't touch piece while running, especially with tool-rest in place.
- Persons forgot to remove the pry bar (used to remove morse taper drive) and tommy bars from scroll chuck before starting lathe, resulting in flying metal.
- Person was turning a burl with the lathe running too fast. Chisel caught on wood resulting in the burl breaking up – half in ceiling and half just missing his head.
- Person was turning a 6"x10" blank and the block came off the lathe striking him in the head. Lathe was running too fast.
- Person was turning a glued up piece which flew apart and embedded in wall behind. Although person suggests glue should set for a few days, the real issue could have been an improper center.
- Person had a friend set up a new lathe. They mounted a glued-up 16"x16"x20" block of maple, started the lathe with the block immediately flying off breaking the tool-rest and embedding in the cinder block wall. The new lathe was improperly set at 3,000 RPMs rather than the 300 RPMs they thought the lathe was set up for.

If nothing else, these examples illustrate the need to wear face protection, stand to side when starting up the lathe, running at appropriate low speeds, and never sand with the tool-rest in place.

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