1. WELDING AND CUTTING SAFETY

The *American Welding Society* and the *American Standards Association*, as well as various governmental and private organizations, have compiled safety standards for the operation of gas and arc welding and cutting equipment. You are encouraged to read these publications and become familiar with their recommendations. The various manufacturers of welding equipment and supplies also publish safety information.

OXYACETYLENE WELDING AND CUTTING SAFETY

The safety recommendations for oxyacetylene welding and cutting covered in this chapter also apply to the other oxyfuel processes, such as oxyhydrogen welding and cutting, oxy-natural gas cutting, and air-acetylene welding.

General Safety Recommendations for Oxyacetylene Welding and Cutting

- Never weld in the vicinity of flammable or combustible materials.
- Never weld on containers that have held combustible or flammable materials without first exercising the proper precautions.
- Never weld in confined spaces without adequate ventilation or individual respiratory equipment.
- Never pick up hot objects.
- Never do any chipping or grinding without suitable goggles.

General Recommendations for Safe Handling of Cylinders and Regulators

- Make certain that the connections between the regulators, adapters, and cylinder valves are gas-tight.

Escaping acetylene can generally be detected by the odor. Test with soapy water—never with an open flame.

- Never move individual cylinders unless the valve protection cap, where provided, is in place, hand-tight.
- Never drop or roughly handle cylinders in any way.
- Make certain that cylinders are well fastened in their station so that they will not fall.
- Never use a hammer or wrench to open any valve on a cylinder.
- Never force connections that do not fit.
- Never tamper with cylinder safety devices.
- Never use oil to clean a regulator gauge. As a combustible substance, oil has a very low flash point.

Protecting Oxygen and Acetylene Hoses

- Always protect hoses from being stepped on or run over. Avoid tangles and kinks. Never leave hoses where they can be tripped over.
- Protect hoses and cylinders from flying sparks, hot slag, hot objects, and open flame.
- Never allow a hose to come into contact with oil or grease; these substances deteriorate the rubber and constitute a hazard with oxygen.

Oxygen Gas and Cylinder Safety Recommendations

- Always refer to oxygen by its full name—oxygen—and not by the word air. This will avoid the possibility of confusing oxygen with compressed air.
- Never use oxygen near flammable materials, especially grease, oil, or any substance likely to cause or accelerate fire. Oxygen itself is not flammable, but it does *strongly* support combustion.
- Do not store oxygen and acetylene cylinders together. They should be separately grouped.

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- Never permit oil or grease to come in contact with oxygen cylinders, valves, regulators, hoses, or fittings. Do not handle oxygen cylinders with oily hands or oily gloves.
- Never use oxygen pressure-reducing regulators, hoses, or other pieces of apparatus with any other gases.
- Always open the oxygen cylinder valve slowly.
- Never attempt to store any other gases in an oxygen cylinder.
- Oxygen must never be used for ventilation or as a substitute for compressed air.
- Never use oxygen from cylinders without first connecting a suitable pressure-reducing regulator to the cylinder valve.
- Never tamper with nor attempt to repair oxygen cylinder valves, unless qualified to do so.

Acetylene Fuel Gas and Cylinder Safety Recommendations

- Call acetylene by its full name—acetylene—and not by the word gas.
- Acetylene cylinders should be used and stored valve end up.
- Never use acetylene from cylinders without a suitable pressure valve.
- Turn the acetylene cylinder so that the valve outlet will point away from the oxygen cylinder.
- When opening an acetylene cylinder valve, do not turn the key or spindle more than one and one-half turns.
- The acetylene cylinder key for opening the valve must be kept on the valve stem while the cylinder is in use, so that the acetylene cylinder may be quickly turned off in an emergency.

- Never use acetylene pressure-reducing regulators, hoses, or other pieces of apparatus with any other gases.
- Never attempt to transfer acetylene from one cylinder to another, refill an acetylene cylinder, or store any other gases in an acetylene cylinder.
- Should a leak occur in an acetylene cylinder, take the cylinder out into the open air, keeping it well away from fires or open lights. Notify the manufacturer immediately if any leaks occur.
- Never use acetylene at pressures in excess of 15 psi. The use of higher pressures is prohibited by all insurance authorities, and by law in many localities.

General Welding and Cutting Safety Tips

- Never use matches for lighting torches (hand burns may result). Use spark lighters, stationary pilot flames, or some other suitable source of ignition.
- Do not light torches from hot work while in a pocket or small confined space.
- Never attempt to relight a torch that has blown out without first closing both valves and relighting in the proper manner.
- Never hang a torch and its hose on regulators or cylinder valves.
- Never cut material in a position that will permit sparks, hot metal, or the severed section to fall on the cylinder, hose, or your legs or feet.
- When welding or cutting is to be stopped temporarily, release the pressure-adjusting screws of the regulators by turning them to the left.
- When the welding or cutting is to be stopped for a long time (during lunch hour or overnight) or taken down, close the cylinder valves and then release all gas

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pressures from the regulators and hose by opening the torch valves momentarily. Close the torch valves and release the pressure-adjusting screws. If the equipment is to be taken down, make certain that all gas pressures are released from the regulators and hoses and that the pressure-adjusting screws are turned to the left until free.

ARC WELDING AND CUTTING SAFETY

Important safety recommendations for the arc welding and cutting processes include the following:

- Keep the work area and floor clean and clear of electrode stubs, scraps of metal, and carelessly placed tools.
- Always work in a well-ventilated area. This is the best protection against toxic fumes and dust. If the ventilation is poor, adequate respiratory equipment is necessary.
- Make sure cable connections are tight and that cables do not become hot.
- Never look at an electric arc with the naked eye. An electric arc gives off harmful radiation. Goggles with suitable lenses and protective clothing are recommended as protection against these rays, as well as against flying sparks, splattering metal, and hot metal.
- Electric shock can be avoided by proper handling of the arc welding equipment. The arc welding machine must be properly grounded at all times. The work area should be dry. All insulation (wiring, electrodes, and so forth) should be checked, and replaced if damaged.
- Never weld while wearing wet gloves or wet shoes.
- Never use electrode holders with defective jaws.
- Never leave the electrode holder on the table or in contact with a grounded metallic surface. Place it on the support provided for that purpose.

- Never weld on closed containers or on containers that have held combustible materials.
- Never allow an arc welding machine to rest on a dirt floor.
- Operate arc welding machines and equipment only in clean, dry locations.
- Insofar as possible, protect arc welding machines in the field from weather conditions.
- Always install an arc welding machine in compliance with the requirements of the *National Electrical Code* and local ordinances, and make certain it is properly grounded.
- Use the proper terminals on the arc welding machine for the power line voltage connection.
- Never work on the wiring of an arc welding machine unless qualified to do so.

WELDING AND CUTTING SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Eye Protection

The welder and others associated with welding operations should be provided with glasses designed to provide maximum protection while affording adequate vision for proper welding technique. Until recently it was customary to assume that if the visible rays were cut down to a comfortable intensity, the ultraviolet and infrared rays were also reduced proportionately. The usual practice was to use alternate layers of red and blue glass to reduce the light intensity to a value consistent with the work being done. Such a procedure may or may not offer complete protection, because some glasses strongly absorb the visible rays while transmitting the harmful infrared or ultraviolet rays quite freely.

Scientific methods for testing protective lenses have been developed. These tests have resulted in the establishment of standards for lenses of various grades and have led to the

development of glass formulas that have materially increased the protective qualities of lenses. Complete and positive protection for the eyes is now available. Suggested shades for various types of welding and joining operations are given in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 Recommended Lens Shades for Various Welding and Cutting Operations

Operation	***Shade Number***
Torch Brazing	3 or 4
Oxyacetylene Cutting	
>1″ thick metal	3 or 4
1 to 6″ thick metal	4 or 5
6″ thick metal and thicker	5 or 6
Oxyfuel Gas Welding	
>1/8″	4 or 5
1/8 to 1/2″	5 or 6
1/2″ and up	6 or 8
Oxyacetylene Flame Spraying	5
Shielded Metal-Arc Welding (SMAW)	
up to 5/32″ electrodes	10
3/16- to 1/4″ electrodes	12
5/16″ electrodes and up	14
Gas Metal-Arc Welding (GMAW) – MIG Welding	
>60 amps	8 to 10
60–160 amp range	11
160–250 amp range	12
250 amps and above	14
Flux Cored-Arc welding (FCAW)	
>60 amps	8 to 10
60–160 amp range	11
160–250 amp range	12
250 amps and above	14

(*continued*)

Table 1-1 (*continued*)

Operation	*Shade Number*
Gas Tungsten-Arc Welding (GTAW) – TIG Welding	
>20 amps	5 to 9
20–100 amp range	10 to 11
100–400 amp range	12
400 amps and above	14
Plasma-Arc Welding	
>20 amps	8
20–100 amp range	10
100–400 amp range	12
400 amps and above	14
Soldering	2

Eye Protection Tips:

- Seeing white spots in your vision after you've stopped welding and removed your goggles is an indication that you need darker lenses.
- Failure to distinguish between a neutral and a carburizing oxyacetylene flame while wearing your goggles is an indication that the colored lenses you are wearing are too dark.
- If you cannot see the weld puddle while wearing your goggles, you need a lighter-colored lens.

NOTE

Federal specifications for welding lenses specify not only the percentage of rays transmitted by the various shade numbers, but also the thickness of the glass and its optical properties.

Proper lens selection is important. There is a vast difference in welding lenses, both as to their value and their effect on welding production. It is impossible to distinguish one lens

from another by casual inspection. Scientific tests are required to determine their qualities. It is vitally important when selecting a welding lens to take into account the reputation of the manufacturer and their experience in the welding field.

NOTE

Install screens or barriers to protect nearby workers from flash and glare created by the welding or cutting process.

Nonspatter cover glass is a chemically treated glass that protects the lens from spatter yet allows maximum visibility. Spatter does not adhere to this special type of glass, prolonging its life to five or ten times that of ordinary glass and maintaining clear visibility. A soft cloth should be used for cleaning.

Goggles are available in a great number of different designs and types. Either glass or plastic lenses may be purchased, and the lenses themselves can be either clear or tinted. Most goggles have either round or rectangular lenses.

Face shields are also useful for protecting the face of the operator against flying sparks and other dangerous matter. They find widespread use in arc welding and cutting. Face shields are available in clear plastic or in different shades of green and can be purchased in several thicknesses. (ANSI requires a minimum thickness of 0.041 inch or more.) Note: Face shields provide limited impact and splash protection.

Helmets, safety caps, and other headgear have been designed for operators of welding and cutting equipment to protect the head against serious blows. These are available in many different designs and a great number of sizes. The helmets are made from either molded fiberglass or metal plate.

Respirators

It is absolutely necessary that proper ventilation be provided for each welding and cutting operation. The fumes produced during welding and cutting can be injurious to the welder's health (see Table 1-2). Some fumes, such as those produced

Table 1-2 Some Common Sources of Potentially Hazardous Fumes

Type	*Comments*
Beryllium	Beryllium is found in beryllium base metal, beryllium alloys, and some filler metals. Breathing even small amounts of dust containing beryllium or beryllium fumes can cause lung inflammation, serious lung disease, and cancer.
Bismuth	
Cadmium	Cadmium is found in cadmium-coated base metals, filler metals, and fluxes. The fumes are extremely toxic.
Cleaning compounds and solvents	Cleaning compounds and solvents are potentially hazardous to the health. Gasoline and benzene, for example, produce toxic fumes and are also flammable. The vapors of some solvents, such as trichloroethylene, create toxic halogens and phosgene when in contact with a hot object or a welding arc.
Columbium (Niobium)	Columbium (niobium) contains many highly toxic compounds. Metallic columbium dust is an eye and skin irritant and also can be a fire hazard.
Lead	Lead, lead alloys, and lead coatings or paints containing lead can be dangerous. Breathing lead fumes can cause a wide variety of serious health problems, ranging from simple eye irritation to damage to the kidneys, heart, liver, and brain.
Manganese	Manganese is found in many welding products, such as electrodes and welding rods. Manganese is toxic to the brain and central nervous system when the levels in the body exceed normal limits. Breathing welding fumes containing manganese over a long period of time can lead to *manganism*, a condition similar to Parkinson's disease.

(*continued*)

Table 1-2 (*continued*)

Type	***Comments***
Mercury	Mercury is found in some paints and coatings used on metals. Breathing mercury vapors can result in serious pulmonary and neurological disorders. Symptoms include coughing, chest pains, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and a metallic taste in the mouth.
Zinc	Zinc oxide fumes are released when the zinc layer on zinc-coated metals is melted. These fumes result in a condition known as *metal fume fever* or *zinc chills*, with symptoms resembling a viral flu.
Zirconium	Zirconium is found in beryllium base metal and alloys. Breathing zirconium fumes can cause irritation to the respiratory tract. Symptoms may include coughing, shortness of breath, sore throat, and runny nose.

when working with zinc, lead, or cadmium, can be toxic. These conditions also hold true for braze welding, brazing, and soldering.

Other sources of hazardous fumes produced during the various welding, joining, and cutting processes include antimony, bismuth, chromium, cobalt, copper, magnesium, molybdenum, nickel, thorium, and vanadium.

In the case of permanent welding stations, the size of the working area is an important consideration. Overcrowding will reduce the effectiveness of any ventilating system. The ventilating system itself (exhaust fans, etc.) should be designed to keep the level of toxic fumes and other contaminants at or below the maximum permitted level. Individual respiratory equipment is sometimes necessary when room ventilation is inadequate.

Protective Clothing

The manufacturers of welding equipment and supplies offer a broad range of protective clothing for welders, such as leather jackets; cape sleeves with detachable bib; waist, bib, or split-leg aprons; and shirt sleeves with snap fasteners at the wrist and adjustable leather straps at the top of the arm.

- Pants, shirts, and other clothing should be made of a flame-resistant material. The pants should be without cuffs, because cuffs can trap sparks and bits of molten metal.
- The clothing must be thick enough to minimize or prevent penetration by the dangerous radiation given off by an arc. The arc rays produce very strong visible and invisible rays (both ultraviolet and infrared) that can burn the eyes and skin. This radiation cannot be seen, but it is present. Any exposed skin can be burned quickly by these rays, which cause skin burns similar to sunburn.
- Sleeve cuffs should be tight against the wrist to prevent trapping flying sparks or molten particles. For this purpose, elastic bands or gauntlet cuffs are recommended.
- Black, flame-resistant cotton twill is often recommended for use with inert gas arc welding. Protective clothing made from this type of cloth is cheaper and lighter than leather.
- Wear high-top leather shoes, work shoes, or boots. Tennis shoes are not acceptable footwear.