Clothing, Safety, and Comfort in the Winter Woodturning Shop

Wells Shoemaker, January, 2025

One of our club's new turners is coming for a starter lesson this weekend. I thought I would share these safety and comfort hints for members who are starting out in cold weather, and perhaps for other members who are teaching.

Low frequency/high consequence injuries at the lathe are nearly completely avoidable. They include:

1. The grisliest injuries occur when **loose hair or loose clothing** get caught by a spinning piece of wood driven by a 2 hp motor.
2. **Eye protection is essential** any time you're close to a moving tool...any tool.
3. Scrapes, cuts, and bruises tend to **afflict the left hand**, which is closest to the moving blank.
4. **Jewelry** can snag a moving blank and do real harm in a millisecond.
5. **Dust inhalation** may present early on as a mild, dry cough, but years of exposure can lead to chronic inflammation and crippling lung damage.
6. **Slipping on a dusty floor** next to a moving chunk of wood can lead to pain.

Here's how to prevent most or all of those injuries.

1. In winter, you'll want an outer layer with **tight cuffs on the sleeves**. Choose a fabric that sheds dust...not a fleece. I use a “beater” sweatshirt.
2. **No drawstrings** dangling down. Actually, no drawstrings anywhere, period.
3. A watch cap might be handy if it's chilly...but no strings.
4. **No dangling** earrings or loose necklaces or loose bracelets or drooping collars. Check the jewelry at the door, perhaps in a designated madrone bowl.
5. **Rings.** Simple band rings are low risk, but **rings with a protruding stone** are best kept in a pouch for the turning time...plus, you’ll never find the stone.
6. A **wristwatch** on your left hand is subject to chafing (oops) or, worse, snagging from the spinning wood. Best to stash a bulky watch in a pouch...or a maple bowl.
7. **No hanging braids.** Best to tie your hair in back, or better...tuck into a bun, or wrap in a kerchief or a cap. (With three daughters, you would think I'd know the terminology better.)
8. If you have **thin, flexible, leather gloves**, bring them. Your exposed left hand in particular can get scuffed. A snug fit is important for dexterity.

9. Purchase **quality, clear eye protection glasses**...and use them the whole time you're in the shop. Bifocals are available for < $20. Keep multiple backups handy so you're not tempted to risk an injury that can change your life.
10. Ditto for a **face shield**. Use both the glasses and the shield for better protection from kinetic particles.
11. **Shoes with non-skid soles**. I prefer low cut, somewhat flexible but not flimsy models. (Stiff, mid height hiking boots are not great for ergonomics...says the turner/shoemaker.) Regular police the shavings and dust on the floor.
12. I have an excellent **dust collector and N95 masks**. As you do more at home, you'll want to buy them by the box.

Stay safe, have fun, come back for more.

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