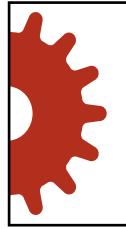


ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE FIRE HAZARDS that exist in any machine shop? We all know that fire extinguishers, a sprinkler system, an alarm system, and proper documentation is a requirement for shops such as ours that always have a large amount of oil in use in various ways. I hope that you are all prepared in these standard practices, but how much thought have you given to the possibilities of fires occurring in your machines? In the gear business we are being asked more often to machine gears out of exotic materials, which may react differently than do the materials that we're



# SITESAFETY

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The industrial workplace can be cold and drafty in winter, and people can't be blamed for trying to stay warm. But keep a close eye on how they go about doing it.


“Every company should have a policy concerning the use, care, maintenance, and placement of space heaters in their facility. I cannot stress enough how important this is.”

used to. Oil-based coolants, and even water-soluble coolants, may need to be better researched as to how they react to the various materials we are now cutting.

Another concern is the newer machines that incorporate automatic loading and unloading. This is a real advantage to the shop, as it lends itself to so called “lights out” operations. But again we must be sure that we do not create a hazard that may cause a fire in a machine, as such a fire—particularly in an untended circumstance—can actually put a shop out of business. Of course, there are a number of companies that specialize in safety equipment and handle fire suppression systems that can be retrofitted to your equipment, and this is a good if albeit expensive practice. At a bare minimum you should carefully read the MSDS information on the coolants and other oils that are used in your equipment so that you are aware of any potential problems. If you do not understand

the MSDS information, be sure to contact your supplier for a full explanation. This is definitely a case of better safe than sorry.

Another fire hazard we have to consider at this time of year is the use of space heaters. When we have these extremely cold winters, as appears to be the norm lately, space heaters seem to appear out of nowhere. I realize that many of our smaller shops are in older, poorly insulated facilities, and that space heaters are a necessary evil. But we must consider the hazards that exist due to the use of these space heaters. Electric heaters cause fires by improper placement, electrical shorts, or just careless use. Propane, kerosene, and wood-fired heaters—as well as waste-oil heaters—compound the dangers by using flammable sources of fuel. These types of heaters also create the additional hazard of carbon monoxide buildup. Every company should have and enforce a written, well-publicized policy concerning the use, care, maintenance, and placement of space heaters in their facility. I cannot stress enough how important such a policy is, and how necessary it is to enforce it.

We have discussed OSHA in recent columns. They have some “Quick Start” information available at [www.osha.gov/dcsp/compliance\\_assistance/quick-starts/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/compliance_assistance/quick-starts/index.html). This is a very friendly page in which you can garner some quick insights on any safety subject that might apply to your situation. They have this information broken down into very useable pieces with links to further information on many different subjects. You do not have to read through a bunch of things you are not interested in to get the information you require. There are a couple of OSHA-sponsored events coming up that you may be interested in. One is “Inspections & Audits” on Feb. 10 at the Elgin Community College in Elgin, Illinois. The OSHA contact is Nancy Quick, compliance assistance specialist, and she can be reached at (630) 896-8700. The other one is “How to Survive an OSHA Inspection” on April 8 at Safety Guys, Inc., in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The OSHA contact in this case is Vergie Bain, compliance assistance specialist, at (954) 423-0382. These events, and others presented by OSHA, appear to be well worth your time. 

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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