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Health and Safety – General Safety Guidance - 14.2.2018

A woodturning lathe can be a dangerous piece of workshop equipment in unskilled hands. With attention to the following basic guidelines and careful, methodical, and tidy workshop practice, the incidence of accidents can be drastically reduced. If in doubt about the safety of any procedure, please seek experienced, or better yet, qualified advice.

1. Safe, effective use of a wood lathe requires study and knowledge of procedures for using this tool. Read and thoroughly understand the label warnings on the lathe and in the owner's/operator's manual.
2. Always wear safety goggles or safety glasses that include side protectors and a full-face shield when needed. Wood dust can be harmful to your respiratory system. Use a dust mask or helmet and proper ventilation (dust collection system) in dusty work conditions. Wear hearing protection during extended periods of operation.
3. Tie back long hair, do not wear gloves, loose clothing, Jewelry, or any dangling objects that may catch in rotating parts or accessories.
4. Check the owner/operator's manual for proper speed recommendations. Use slower speeds for larger diameter or rough pieces and increased speed for smaller diameters and pieces that are balanced. If the lathe is shaking or vibrating, lower the speed. If the workpiece vibrates, always stop the machine to check the reason.
5. Make certain that the belt guard or cover is in place. Check that all clamping devices (locks), such as on the tailstock and toolrest are tight.
6. Rotate your workpiece by hand to make sure it clears the toolrest and bed before turning the lathe "on". Be sure that the workpiece turns freely and is firmly mounted. It is always safest to turn the lathe "off" before adjusting the tool rest.
7. Exercise caution when using stock with cracks, splits, checks, bark, knots, irregular shapes or protuberances.
8. Hold turning tools securely on the toolrest and hold the tool in a controlled but comfortable manner. Always use a slower speed when starting until the workpiece is balanced. This helps avoid the possibility of an unbalanced piece jumping out of the lathe and striking the operator.
9. When running a lathe in reverse, it is possible for a chuck or faceplate to unscrew unless it is securely tightened on the lathe spindle with a locking machine screw.
10. Know your capabilities and limits. An experienced woodturner may be capable of techniques and procedures not recommended for beginning turners.
11. When using a faceplate, be certain the workpiece is solidly mounted. When turning between centers, be certain the workpiece is secure.
12. Always remove the toolrest before sanding or polishing operations.
13. Don't overreach, keep proper footing and balance at all times.
14. Keep lathe in good repair. Check for damaged parts, alignment, binding of moving parts and other conditions that may affect its operation.
15. Keep tools sharp and clean for better and safer performance. Wear eye protection when sharpening. Don't force a blunt tool. Don't use a tool for a purpose not intended. Keep tools out of reach of children. Do not be tempted to use modified tools, such as converted files.
16. Consider your work environment. Don't use lathe in damp or wet locations. Do not use in presence of flammable liquids or gases. Keep work area well lit.
17. Stay alert. Watch what you are doing, use common sense. Don't operate tool when you are tired or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
18. Guard against electric shock. Inspect electric cables regularly for damage. Avoid the use of extension cables. The power outlet supplying the lathe should, for safety, be fitted with RCD protection.
19. Remove chuck keys and adjusting spanners. Form a habit of checking for these before switching on the lathe.
20. Never leave the lathe running unattended. Turn power off. Don't leave the lathe until it comes to a complete stop.