



## Use of Compressed Air for Cleaning Purposes

Compressed air is frequently used in industry today for a variety of operations, including cleaning various pieces of equipment and machinery. Although compressed air is a very valuable and resourceful tool, it can also be very dangerous and deadly if not used correctly.

Injuries resulting from compressed air for cleaning are infrequent, but when they do occur, they are usually very serious. Employees need to learn the hazards associated with the improper use of compressed air for cleaning and must follow certain rules and guidelines to avoid serious injuries.

Ordinary compressed air contains large amounts of impurities, which can enter through the skin or openings on the human body. Employees often use compressed air to blow dirt or dust off their skin and clothing after completing a shift. If this dust is blown into the employee's eyes, nose, mouth, ears, etc., it can cause an infection or serious illness. The high velocity at which compressed air is expelled from the hose creates yet another hazard. When air at this velocity is directed at the human skin, there is a possibility of puncture, through which the impurities enter the system resulting in an infection or illness.

Horseplay is all too often another common hazard associated with using compressed air. Employees play practical jokes on one another, which can lead to serious injuries. Although avoidable, these accidents still occur quite frequently.

If a power unit is preferred over a broom for cleaning purposes, use a vacuum system instead of compressed air. This will limit the amount of flying particles and dust in the air. A vacuum will collect dust and dirt, a compressed air hose with nozzle will just move it around. If an air compressor must be used, the nozzle pressure must be at 30 PSI, or less (CFR 1910.242[b]).

## Rules for Using Compressed Air for Cleaning

1. Do not use compressed air for cleaning yourself or your clothing.
2. Compressed air should not be used to blow dust, dirt, chips, etc. off machinery equipment when a broom, brush, or vacuum cleaner can do a more efficient job. Never use compressed air to clean dusts that are combustible as they can become airborne and increase the risk of fire or explosion.
3. Avoid using air for sweeping floors, tables, shelves, etc. Flying dust or debris can create serious hazards.
4. Never point an air hose at anyone.
5. When compressed air is absolutely necessary for cleaning be sure everyone is clear, and proper personal protective equipment is used. The type of personal protective equipment required depends on the job being done, and may vary from safety glasses with side shields, to full faces shields, to supplied air breathing apparatus with face mask and hood. Consult with your supervisor to determine the proper personal protective equipment needed.
6. Only approved nozzles are allowed on air hoses. OSHA Standards limit air output to 30 PSI for cleaning purposes. Air hoses missing safety air nozzles must not be used until the safety nozzle has been replaced.
7. Report defective nozzles, gauges and regulators to your supervisor.
8. Tools and air nozzles should be secured to the air lines and hoses to prevent the tool from being accidentally expelled, and to prevent the air hoses from whipping.
9. Always return an air hose to its proper storage place after use to prevent the hose from becoming a trip and fall hazard.

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