Make sure your HOBBY is safe!

Beware those "harmless" products you use in your favorite pastime; they may affect your health.

by Marion Gleason

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A HOBBY CAN be a vital source of relaxation and "doing it yourself" can be downright necessary —but be careful! A power saw can remove a finger as well as a knot, and a garden spray can poison you as well as the beetles on your rosebush.

Machinery once found only in factories now has its counterpart in thousands of home workshops — with no inspector to see that safety guards are in place. Stores offer an endless array of products containing potentially harmful chemicals, some so toxic their use has been discontinued in industry. But hobbyists are unrestricted in their use of products and tools which can be exceedingly dangerous, so they must be on their guard.

Makers of do-it-yourself materials usually include careful instructions, but unfortunately Johnnie isn't the only member of the family who can't read. Father and mother, sister and brother suffer the same handicap when faced with detailed "instructions for use" or a warning label.

Even after reading the labels, however, some hobbyists insist on doing things their own way. As a result, home is becoming more hazardous than the highway.

Such apparently harmless pursuits as stamp collecting, gardening, craft work, insect collecting, motor boating, and photography involve use of chemicals which can be harmful—solvents, bleaches, rust removers, cleaners, paint thinners, insecticides, and fumigants, to name a few. Most are harmless when used properly, but many contain ingredients which can cause injury or illness.

I remember reading, for example, of a 10-year-old boy who enjoyed inhaling the fumes of paint remover or cleaning fluid. His doctor found the boy's blood count to be low and despite the prescription of liver extract and iron, blood transfusions were needed to keep him alive.

Studying the case more deeply, the alert physician learned of the boy's sniffing habit, developed when his parents were redecorating their home. When the habit was stopped, the boy's health became normal.

Often, a patient will not link his illness with exposure to a noxious substance used around the house. This is especially true of substances which do not irritate the throat or eyes, do not have an unpleasant odor, or were used some time before he began feeling ill.

The most prevalent noxious hazard around the home or workshop is carbon tetrachloride. It has replaced cyanide, ether, and chloroform as a quick killer of butterflies and beetles. Philatelists use it to clean stamps and examine watermarks, in preference to flammable benzine. Photographers use it to clean film. And craft teachers recommend it as a cleaning fluid and solvent because it isn't a fire hazard.

Yet carbon tetrachloride is twice as toxic as chloroform. Brief exposure to a large amount can kill quickly while continued exposure to even a small amount can seriously damage the liver and kidneys.

There are differences, of course, in personal susceptibility to harmful chemicals. But all of us should be careful about handling substances known to be dangerous.

Take the boy who is a model-airplane enthusiast. He fills his toy motor with ethyl gasoline, which could produce chronic lead poisoning. Then he starts the motor, which exhausts carbon-monoxide gas into the room. The boy probably will not become sick, but he may get dizzy or sleepy—ripe for an accident.

His sister sprays a vine in the garden with an insecticide containing nicotine. Even mild exposure to nicotine can cause dizziness, weakness, and visual disturbances.

Certainly, in these days of stress and strain, a hobby or do-it-yourself project is a wonderful way to relax and refresh your mind and body. Just be sure your pastime isn't pulling you down the path to illness or injury.

Model building is harmless when done cautiously. But remember, toy motors use ethyl gasoline which could poison.