Just Plumb Dangerous

The construction, maintenance and operation of just about every workplace involves the work of plumbers and pipefitters.
Did you know plumbers account for the most emergency room visits of any occupational trade?

Plumbers are treated most often for eye injuries, but the job has many other dangers, including:

- explosive solvent vapors from glues, joint compounds and primers
- biohazards from human waste
- corrosive chemicals
- asbestos used for insulation in old buildings and old plumbing systems
- lead
- scalding hot water and steam
- awkward work postures leading to repetitive strain injuries
- confined spaces with atmospheric hazards such as carbon monoxide
- rats and poisonous snakes and spiders
- extreme weather conditions
- wrenches under force slipping and causing scraped knuckles, bruises and worse injuries

Eye injuries are common for plumbers, caused when a foreign object enters the eye as a result of working overhead, soldering, welding, grinding metal, painting or handling pressurized pipes.

Plumbers and others working around eye hazards can reduce injuries by:

- wearing eye protection
- using barriers or different materials to reduce dust and metal fragments
- applying water to settle dust in some situations when this procedure would not cause other hazards

Plumbing work takes place in many work environments – residential

and commercial construction as well as maintenance of various types of buildings and industrial plants. Plumbers are called out in extremely cold weather to thaw and repair pipes.

People who do plumbing repairs at home are also at risk for many of these hazards. One of the worst hazards is the type of chemical used to clear drains. These drain cleaners are usually caustic chemicals. They are effective because they are corrosive, burning their way through other materials. They have the same effect on the human body, burning skin, eyes and lungs on contact.

If you buy a drain cleaner, carefully read the instructions. Store it out of reach of a child or pet. Use it only as directed, and read the directions each time you use it. Wear the recommended gloves and eye protection. Dispose of leftover drain cleaner according to instructions on the label, to prevent harm to people, pets and the environment.

Better yet, try to keep drains running freely without resorting to drain cleaners, which find their way into the environment and water supplies. Try dumping hot water down the drain, or using a plunger or a device called a snake. If you take apart the trap below a sink, make sure you don’t get splashed by any drain cleaner you might have applied earlier. Mixing the wrong toxic or flammable substances together has killed more than one do-it-yourself plumber. If you are not sure you are up to doing the job safely, call a plumber.

Whether you are a full-time plumber, a custodian or maintenance employee or a householder, be aware of the many hazards associated with this kind of work.