

WARNING: Read This

Have you read any good tool operating manuals lately? Me neither.

If you've purchased a power tool recently you know what I'm referring to: those instructions that are written in four languages and the English version is the hardest to understand. They include a standard list of warnings about keeping the guards in place, wearing safety glasses and keeping kids away. Which is always a good idea.

As a longtime tool collector I've seen these operating manuals increase in size as the lawyers have gradually taken over our country. A brazing torch I bought 30 years ago has two pages of instruction whereas my new drill carries on for 36 pages! It should have labels warning me against eye strain or a back injury from lifting it!

The manuals are like ads for drugs on TV, warning you that their use could cause nerve injury, burns, death and even incontinence. (Okay, so I made that last one up.) Even the small electric Weedeater® I use to trim the edge of my lawn warns that "improper use could result in fatality." I wonder just how many people die each year from whacking themselves to death with a Weedeater®?

The manufacturers of my lawn mower warn, "because of hazardous exhaust fumes, DO NOT run indoors." Are there people living amongst who are using their lawnmowers to mow their carpets?

I have an ax to grind with the masochists who write these things. (If I really did have an ax to grind it would probably come with a 40 page operators manual.) They spend two paragraphs warning you not to plug a polarized plug into a socket the wrong way, which is impossible, and then warn, "Do not use tool if it does not turn on or off." I ask you, how do you use a tool if it does not turn on?

On my bigger gas weed whacker I am told that, “the coating on the catalytic converter can be hazardous if consumed.” Do they think I’m so hungry that I’ll start munching on the catalytic converter?

I just had to laugh when I got a new Dremel, one of the best tools ever invented, and the instructions warned me to wear protective hair covering to keep my hair from getting in the air vents. Now, I estimate that the longest hair on my head is half an inch long and the only way I’m going to get my hair into the air vents is if I use the Dremel to massage my scalp. Those same instructions warn me not to cut any logs with my Dremel, which use cutting discs that are about an inch in diameter. I know that whenever I’m going to cut firewood the first tool I reach for is my Dremel.

I’m not supposed to use my legs as a sawhorse while using my saber saw or remove the bolt holding the rotary blade in my lawn mower while it’s spinning. Duh. But why can’t I expose my wet/dry vac to rain? Are they afraid it will get wet?

If I ever loan the neighbor my new drill I’m supposed to give him the manual and make him promise to read it before using it. (Has anyone in recorded history ever done this?) What really cracks me up is, “repairs should only be performed by a qualified technician.” Then why do they include a parts list and a phone number for you to order your own parts?

In big letters in every manual it warns the operator not to operate if you are tired. Can’t you just see some carpenter who stayed up late the night before watching a ball game tell his boss when he went to work the next day, “I’m sorry boss, but I can’t work today cause I’m a little tired.” And if everyone who was taking some kind of medication had to quit using power tools, all construction, farming, and manufacturing in this country would grind to an immediate halt.

The instructions say I shouldn’t use my grinder to stand on, or my table saw as an anvil. Under no circumstances should I let visitors stand on my extension cord and I’m not supposed to use my chain saw if I’m upset. But if they don’t want me to get so upset they should have made the darn thing easier to start to begin with!

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts
