

# Working Safely and Being Responsible

It should come as no surprise to anyone in the welding industry that welding fumes can be dangerous.

Packaging for welding electrodes has carried warning labels since the mid-1960s that say so. And, anyone who has welded has seen — or should have seen — those warnings repeatedly. Similar warnings have been placed on welding equipment.

That is a direct acknowledgement of the potential for danger that welding presents, and it is a clear statement that whoever is welding should take the necessary steps to protect themselves and others.

Dangers are inherent in welding just as they are a part of many other basic industries, and there have been many safety measures put into place to make workplaces safer.



Just as it's not a good idea to weld without a helmet or to weld with bare skin exposed, it is not a good idea to breathe welding fumes. Using a helmet, covering your skin and using adequate

ventilation are among the many precautions that welders know are part of the job.

We, at Welding magazine, have written articles about welding fumes and welding fume litigation, and we have tried to take a responsible and straightforward point of view on the subject.

In pursuit of being forthright about the industry, I've sat in court listening to lawyers argue about welding fumes. I've reviewed court documents that the lawyers for both sides have filed, and I have read — admittedly not all, but big parts of — epidemiological studies that were done on welders in Sweden and the U.S.

After all of that, I've come to the conclusion that the allegations that lawyers have made about the dangers of welding fumes and about the industry attempting to cover up the potential for danger from welding fumes are groundless.

If, on the other hand, I thought there was substance to the numerous lawsuits that have been filed over the alleged harm that welding fumes could cause to welders, I would be dogging the engineers and executives in this industry demanding answers, and writing about how they replied.

That's not to say that welding is not dangerous

or that welding fumes cannot harm welders if they don't take the proper precautions. And, I also am not saying that there aren't welders who have developed serious medical problems.

My heart goes out to those welders. However, I think that they are among the many unfortunate persons who are prone to having medical problems and, unfortunately, I think that it is likely that they would have medical problems no matter what careers they chose. As a result, I don't think the makers of welding consumables can or should be held responsible.

What's more important than my opinion, jurors and judges in numerous court cases came to the same conclusions after hearing all of the evidence presented by both sides.

I am not an apologist for the producers of welding consumables who have been involved in those lawsuits, but I'm also not going to mindlessly support the plaintiffs' lawyers who seem to have their own agendas, and, that they have their own agendas should be kept in mind.

The topic for this commentary comes up because we have in this issue a statement from a representative of welding consumable manufacturers who is responding to an article in another magazine (See Page 31).

As I say in the introduction to that response, anyone can gauge the truthfulness of both the consumable manufacturers' representative and the writer from the other magazine by reading the court documents, reviewing the medical studies and considering the verdicts in the cases that have been tried.

The producers of welding consumables are making products that our growing and vibrant economy needs to make and to maintain the products and the infrastructure that allow us to live our comfortable lives.

It's unfortunate that there are dangers involved in building and maintaining the world that we live in, but there are safety measures that can be used to minimize those dangers and to promote healthy working conditions.

There are no fool-proof safety measures, but those that are provided should be used to their fullest. In welding, that means using a respirator or a ventilation system or a vacuum system to provide adequate aeration.

It's the way to work safely. ■

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