

Carl Manansala, an auto service tech for Precision Auto Services in Langley, B.C., demonstrates proper reaching technique while owner Scott Waddle supervises.

Be attuned to auto shop hazards

By Lynn Welburn

If you're working in an auto repair shop, you've probably got your mind on getting a vehicle moving again. Instead, you'll need to shift your mind back to thinking about your safety — and the safety of your co-workers.

First and foremost, says WorkSafeBC transportation industry specialist Kevin Bennett, focus on using the right equipment and following safe work procedures to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries. "Like many industries, the majority of injury claims for repair shops are due to overexertion caused by activities like manual handling," he says. "Your employer has a responsibility to provide the right equipment and develop procedures to eliminate or, if that isn't possible, minimize risks that can injure you or your co-workers."

Bennett points out that between 2010 and 2014, workers injured by overexertion accounted for 28 percent of claims leading to lost time from work. Another 22 percent of incidents involved being struck by materials, which can include items such as tools, vehicles, and tires. Another 15 percent of claims were associated with slips and falls.

Scott Waddle, owner of Precision Auto Services in Langley for the past 18 years, says some basic safety precautions for auto workers are to keep a clean workspace and stay aware of your surroundings.

"In every shop, there are other people working around you, cars going in and out, motorized tools and flammable liquids and gases, and slipping hazards," Waddle says. "You really need to be aware of what's going on around you."

Here are five things to keep in mind while you're working in the shop:

- 1 Avoid back and other muscle strain by using the right equipment for the job. Position materials and equipment close to hip height to minimize bending. Carry out work close to the body and adjust the height of the vehicle to reduce awkward postures. Opt for power tools that reduce the amount of force required to do the job. Consider using floor creepers (rolling repair stools) that can be adjusted and top creepers you can lean against if you have to work over an engine. When installing or removing mounted tires, use a "hoist hanger" to support the tire.
- 2 Follow the written traffic management procedures when moving vehicles. This can include activities such as moving vehicles only in designated areas and performing a "circle check" before starting a vehicle to scan for tools or materials that might create a hazard.
- 3 Avoid slips, trips, and falls by maintaining a clean work area. Regularly remove debris and clean floors to eliminate slippery substances. Organize carts and trays to keep tools within easy reach and off the floor.
- 4 Wear appropriate personal protective equipment. You have the right to be outfitted with the safety gear required to do the job safely. Use Nitrile or high-quality safety gloves where appropriate. Wear hi-visibility vests with tear-away properties while working around moving vehicles. Use safety

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glasses while in the shop, as well as hearing and respiratory protection when required.

- 5 Follow procedures for controlled products and shop equipment. Participate in workplace training programs so you can recognize and understand the information on WHMIS (workplace hazardous materials information system) labels. If you are unsure about the use, storage, or first aid measures for a controlled product, ask your supervisor for guidance. Follow operating procedures for auto lifts, which, at a minimum, must be inspected and tested monthly. Follow training and procedures when inflating tires, especially large vehicle tires.

One of the most important safety measures is to speak out on behalf of your own safety, and know you have the right to do so. "You have the right to know what hazards are present and how these hazards can affect you. You also have the right to refuse unsafe work," Bennett says. "Tell your boss if you notice something unsafe."

For more information about keeping yourself safe in an auto shop environment, check out www.ara.bc.ca/about-education-training/ara-health-safety/ara-health-safety-employee-orientation. ☺

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