

Adrian Morgan



See no evil, hear no evil, inhale no evil

But, for *Adrian*, wearing mask, goggles and ear defenders carry risks of their own

It's a dangerous business safety. Every time I use the planer it's a case of: "OK Morgan, what's it to be? Asphyxiated by oak dust, blinded by a wood chip or deafened. You choose." I go through phases. One day I might put on the whole shebang: ear defenders, mask and goggles. Other days I think: "What the hell." Some days I won't find my mask for hours, and when I do it's caked in dust. I shake it, put it over my mouth and inhale a day's worth of dust in one gulp.

Then there's the question: in what order do you put on your safety gear? Strap on goggles first and the ear defenders fit no problem. But the mask? No. So it's off with the lot of it – like trying to put your shoes on before your socks. So it's mask, goggles, then ear defenders.

Oh that it were that simple. The mask, no matter how careful I am, is always full of dust or moisture (or both). The goggles are never crystal clear, and over glasses it's like looking through grubby double-glazing. Which means I can't see much. Which means I often can't find my ear defenders. Especially when it's hot and the fug from my mask steams up my goggles. Before I've put on the ear defenders I'm staggering around with my hands out, tripping over things.

Put the ear defenders on and I'm deaf. Thus deaf, half blind and breathing heavily I grope towards one of the most lethal, yet innocuous-looking, pieces of boat-shop equipment: the bandsaw. I press the green button, and a faint whirring noise becomes apparent. I push the workpiece against the blade and nothing happens. The whirring noise was the fridge in the deer larder kicking in next door. I have not plugged the bandsaw in.

And so it goes on. And so I have to choose: do I want to hear the bandsaw, and not see it? Or vice versa? Do I value my lungs over my eyes, or my ears over my sight? It seems that I cannot have all three. Mostly, as I already wear glasses, I leave off my goggles – unless I'm grinding steel. When I'm grinding wood then it's mask, ear defenders and no goggles.

As for the planer – which emits a banshee shriek that keeps my shed mice free – my first recourse is to the ear defenders. I figure the chances of a wood chip getting past my glasses is slim, and how much dust can a planer make?

The other day, when the sun slanted through the skylights, I discovered that a planer does indeed make a huge amount of fine dust. The shed was a miasma of suspended dust particles. It was as if I were the meat in a huge pot of dust soup.



CHARLOTTE WATERS

**“Deaf, half blind
I grope towards
the bandsaw”**

Today I resolve to wear at least two out of my three defences. I will wear a mask mostly, and ear defenders whenever it gets noisy. That way at least I'll not be coughing my way to an early grave holding a brass

trumpet to my ear. My eyes? They'll have to take their chances, unless I'm attacking metal with a grinder. The thought of a red-hot sliver of steel in my cornea doesn't appeal.

As for the bandsaw, I reckon that not wearing ear defenders is probably the safest bet – the times I've left it running, and not realised I nearly couldn't count on the fingers on my hands (because I nearly lost them). I am reconciled to losing one digit sooner or later, as I have developed a morbid fascination with that singing blade. Like a man who must stand on the very edge of a precipice, I dice with disaster every time I fire up the bandsaw. The other day I found myself fishing small slivers of wood from beside the blade – without stopping the damn thing. They say that over-familiarity with machinery is the cause of the majority of accidents. Well me and my bandsaw are, you know, just like that. She calls me Posh and I call her Becks (it's an Elektra Beckum). And you can't get much more familiar than that.