

## Why not to blow yourself off with air

A very serious situation occurs when compressed air enters the bloodstream – an aeroembolism. This can happen if the operator is blowing compressed air on themselves or someone else. If the pressure becomes too great or the compressed air is blown directly against the body, the compressed air can get underneath the skin and into the bloodstream.

Compressed air is a concentrated stream of air at high pressure and high speed that can cause serious injury to the operator and the people around him. First, compressed air is a serious hazard. It has been known for compressed air to enter the blood stream through a break in the skin or through a body opening. An air bubble in the blood stream is known medically as an embolism, a dangerous medical condition in which a blood vessel is blocked, in this case, by an air bubble.

An embolism of an artery can cause coma, paralysis or death depending upon its size, duration, and location. While air embolisms are usually associated with incorrect scuba-diving procedures, they are possible with compressed air due to high pressures. This may all seem to be improbable, but the consequences of even a small quantity of air or other gas in the blood can quickly be fatal so it needs to be taken seriously.

Unfortunately, horseplay has been a cause of some serious workplace accidents caused by individuals not aware of the hazards of compressed air and/or proper work procedures. If an air pocket reaches the heart, it causes symptoms like a heart attack. Upon reaching the brain, pockets of air may lead to a stroke. Therefore, to stay safe, do not use pressurized air to blow on yourself and other personnel, and avoid horseplay when working with compressed air.

Alberta OH&S has banned the use of compressed air to blow yourself off.