

Kiln Safety Ideas from Studios in Texas

Clutter and Cramped Spaces

by Arnold Howard

Photos Courtesy of Arnold Howard

In traveling across Texas to repair kilns, the most common safety hazard that I see is clutter. At one high school, the doors on wooden cabinets wouldn't close because of overflowing artwork inside the cabinets. I've even had to move 2 x 4 boards aside to work on the kiln.

The kiln room should always be free of flammable materials such as paper artwork, cardboard, and wooden cabinets and shelves. If you fire your kiln in your garage, be sure that you remove the lawn mower and solvents before firing the kiln.

Also have plenty of space around your kiln. One time I worked on a kiln that was only 18" away from another one that was firing. I had to be careful not to burn myself on the hot kiln next to me. At a garage studio where I was working, the front of the kiln was so close to the garage door that I had to sit on the floor and prop my back on the door to operate the controller.

At one of the Dallas schools where I was working, the separate kiln room was not much larger than a typical closet, and it was cooled by a small portable air conditioner. Unfortunately, the air conditioner failed while the kiln was firing. That resulted in the room becoming so hot that a tray of wax on a table melted, and the kiln's touch screen controller failed. I wouldn't work on the kiln until it was moved to a larger room.

Lid Spring Safety

Most large top-loading kilns have springs to lighten the lid. The spring system must be kept in perfect condition. Please do not scrimp on safety. Replace any rusted springs and bent support arms. I have seen a lid fall because of a damaged support arm.

Kiln problems also can be a result of poor wiring. Remember—do not scrimp on safety. Sometimes a kiln barely heats up, because the plug has been wired incorrectly. I was at a remote ranch late one night and discovered that the 240-volt kiln was getting only 120 volts. That happened because the plug and outlet were miswired.

Circuit Breaker Safety

Recently, two maintenance men at a high school told me to always stand next to a circuit breaker box when flipping breakers on or off. "Never stand in front of the breakers," one of them shared, "because sometimes they explode. I've seen it happen."

One time I was at a glass school, and no one knew how to shut off the breaker to a kiln, which could have led to a dangerous situation at the school. Later, an electrician found the breaker box hidden behind a bulletin board. That incident gives us an important reminder to be sure that you know where the circuit breaker for your kiln is located.

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When I see kiln rooms like this one, I remind teachers of the importance to clear out the clutter and frequently offer teachers other safety suggestions.



Keep the lid spring assembly on your kiln in perfect condition by replacing a bent support arm and any rusted springs. Nothing is more important than your safety.



This is exactly the way I found the inside of a kiln plug. Be extremely careful in wiring anything on a kiln.



This rule is followed by the maintenance men at a Texas high school: Never stand in front of a breaker panel when turning breakers on or off. Be sure to stand next to the panels, out of the way.



While Arnold worked at Paragon Industries, he saw kiln controls evolve from switches to touch screen displays, tested early glass kilns, and wrote instruction manuals. In September 2019, Arnold started Howard Kilns, LLC, a kiln repair and sales business, to serve the Dallas-San Antonio, Texas, area and works on all brands of kilns. Feel free to contact him at arnoldhoward@gmail.com or call/text 972-333-1437.





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