

Lubricate Often

Measure Twice, Cut Once – February 2022

Rob Carver

I do much of my woodworking in winter, but dry air plus sawdust does a number on my hands. After a productive session in my poorly heated shop, I'm often reaching for hand lotion. With chapped skin in mind, my thoughts turn to lubricants in the shop. How many types of oil, wax, grease, powder, or synthetic spray do you have in your shop? Lubricants are essential in the maintenance of tools and shop furnishings. Think about the routine care of your table saw, band saw, jointer, and other high-use power tools. Which products do you favor to keep your larger stationary or benchtop machines running smoothly? How about coatings to protect surfaces and reduce friction?

Smaller tools like drills and routers need regular cleaning and oiling. A few drops of oil extend the life and improve the function of nailers and other pneumatic tools. Is a chainsaw a woodworking tool? Gotta keep the bar and links lubed!

Hand tools also demand lubrication. Metal planes have numerous moving parts, and as Rob Cosman showed us last year, waxing the soles¹ produces finer surfaces efficiently. And if you haven't seen Paul Sellers use his "rag-in-a-can oiler"² for the same purpose, then check it out. A quick drag across a lightly oiled cloth also protects planes, chisels, and other small tools from rust.

Do you use a bit of paraffin, wax, or soap on the threads of a woodscrew before driving it? My dad used the natural oils in his hair for the purpose. What do you use?

I don't keep up with lubrication as often as I should. Right now, the sliding barn doors and cabinet hinges want oil. I should wax the tables of the big tools, sprinkle some baby powder under the crosscut sled, and wipe down my hand tools more faithfully.

What about outside of the shop? Looking beyond the obvious industrial, automotive, culinary, or other household applications, what other aspects of daily life benefit from a little lubrication? The phrase "greasing the skids" came to mind, so I did a bit of research³ on the origin of the phrase. It may have come from the logging industry, referring to the skids used to drag logs out of the forest. Alternatively, it may come from shipwrights' use of skids to launch a vessel from a shipyard. In either case, the term means to facilitate, connoting "preparation, in such a way as to make the subsequent activities easier."

How else do we grease metaphorical skids? How do we keep our skills from rust, and preserve linkages and relationships to facilitate connection, or otherwise to reduce friction? Do you recall the first lines of the Tin Man in the Wizard of Oz as he repeatedly mumbled "oil can?"

¹ <https://robcosman.com/products/rob-cosmans-plane-magic-wax>

² <https://paulsellers.com/2017/02/rag-can-oiler/>

³ <https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/231468/what-is-the-origin-of-the-phrase-grease-the-skids>

Especially in the past two years, we may need help to use the oil can so that we can communicate and move.

Can we compile a list of go-to shop or social lubricants? Please take a moment to send me your favorites at robert.carver@comcast.net. I'll share responses next month.