

## Health and Safety

Artists colours are for use by adults and although some contain potentially hazardous materials, sensible painting practices will enable you to use products without harm to yourself or others.

- As a general rule keep all artists' materials out of reach of children.
- When using oil paints and solvents work in a well ventilated space and do not smoke. For preference use odourless mediums.
- Check with your doctor if you think you may have respiratory problems. Water-soluble oils or acrylics are the safe alternatives if you do.
- Wear a suitable mask when spray painting or air brushing. Don't spray cadmium or chrome pigments.
- If you have a painting session using oils, protect your hands by using barrier cream before you start painting.
- Avoid prolonged skin contact with paint. Wash thoroughly after working.
- **Do not lick** your paintbrushes to a point!

**Toxic Pigments** will not harm you if they are used properly and end up on your painting rather than in your mouth or lungs, or on your skin. When handling dry pigments use a respiratory mask and gloves, to avoid breathing in or ingesting toxic particles.

**Toxic Solvents** are a different matter and are the cause of most health problems related to the use of oil paints.

The oils themselves, from which oil paints are made are not only non-toxic, they are actually edible. It is the turps used in traditional mediums, which causes most of the health problems of which we are now aware. Turps evaporates rapidly from the surface of the painting being worked on and good ventilation is needed to remove the fumes. Archival (brand name) Low Odour Thinners are based on an odourless solvent, which is virtually non-toxic. Because of the slow evaporation rate of this solvent, most of the vapour comes out after you have stacked your painting away to dry: The evaporation rate is 16 times slower than turps, so that groups of people working together never produce enough vapour to create a toxic hazard.

### **Toxic Oil Paints**

Some pigments are based on heavy metals: -  
e.g. cadmiums, lead chromate (used in superchrome), cobalts.

If handling these pigments, do so with care. They can only enter the lungs through breathing spray vapours or pigment powder produced by sandpapering through old paintings. They can only enter the stomach by sucking brushes to a point or eating with fingers/hands still covered with paint.

Regarding absorption through the skin of course, hands should be washed before eating or smoking, but the risk of poisoning by absorption through the skin is very low.

Most painting products are generally clearly labelled. In the end, each individual artist must make the decision of what to use and how to use it, and the best way to work safely is to be well informed about the materials you are using.

“Making art is many things – creative, fun, inspiring, frustrating – but in the end it need not be hazardous to your health”.

References: The Artists Pocket Guidebook, Chroma  
Collins Artist’s Manual