

Devices that use laser light have so many practical uses. Because they are so common in industry today, they are sometimes taken for granted. Lasers should always be treated with respect. They represent dangers to those who work with them, and those who work around them.

Lasers are generally divided into four basic classifications. These classification are based upon a system of graded risk. The higher the class, the greater the potential there is for injury, particularly to the eyes or skin.

Class I	Under normal conditions, will not produce a personal injury hazard.
Class II	Low powered, visible laser beams normally present no hazard if viewed for short periods. Blinking or turning away is a normal human response.
Class IIIa	No hazard if viewed for only momentary periods without protection.
Class IIIb	Can produce a hazard if viewed directly.
Class IV	Hazardous to view with the naked eye under all conditions. This class also has the potential for starting a fire and inflicting skin damage.

Laser manufacturers are required to record the appropriate classification on the laser. If it is missing, or, if the laser has been modified, you should determine its class and safety requirements before activating the system. Some of the basic safety precautions for lasers include:

- Every laser operator must be trained and qualified. Operators must have proof of this qualification and it must stay with them at all times.
- Work areas where lasers are used must be posted with standard warning placards.
- A laser must never be intentionally directed at another employee.
- The laser must be turned off, capped or its beam shuttered when left unattended, such as at meal times, overnight, or during a work shift change.
- Lasers must not be used when it is raining, showing, foggy, or heavy dust is in the air. Such conditions may deflect or scatter the radiation. If production cannot be postponed, then employees must keep well out of the range of the source and target of the laser.

The next time you find yourself working near a laser or laser-guided equipment, check the classification. What are the precautions? What PPE is required? Do posted signs warn of the lasers use?

Respect CAUTION or DANGER signs. They are there to keep you out of harm's way.