People wear jewelry for a lot of different reasons. Sometimes they wear it so others will notice their fashion sense. Sometimes they wear it because it was a gift from someone who cares about them and it has a special meaning. By far, the most common piece of jewelry is a wedding ring, which is worn on the left hand to show commitment. Because wedding rings are such meaningful pieces of jewelry, people resist taking them off, even at work.

For safety reasons, there are times when we need to rethink things. The example of wearing wedding rings is one of those times. One real life story supports this. A worker had a deep burn on the ring finger of his left hand. It looked bad. It was red and blistering and he was in constant pain. When asked what happened, he told his story with a humble grin. He was working to replace a standard 12-volt battery. This is not a complicated job. He did not think there were any hazards involved because he just had to loosen a couple of nuts from the terminal cables, pull the battery out, insert a new battery and retighten the terminals.

This is a simple job without hazards . . . a job you would trust to anyone who knows how to fit a wrench on a nut. If you think this way, you are wrong. There is a safety hazard. It has to do with creating an electrical short to ground. As the worker was tightening the nuts on the battery terminal, he pushed the wrench down toward the battery and his wedding ring touched the opposite battery terminal. If you think that 12 volts is nothing to worry about, you would be wrong again. There may be only 12 volts, but the average truck battery delivers between 650 and 750 cold cranking amps. The amps — the total amount of electricity delivered — are the hazard. When his ring touched the terminal, it created an immediate grounding circuit that instantly flashed and melted his ring. The molten metal burned right into his finger and did not stop until he ripped off the ring.

A task thought to be hazardless proved to be dangerous and painful. The worker had third-degree burns on his ring finger. However, the results of his accident could have been far worse. If any hydrogen gas had been present as a result of the electrolytic action of the battery, there could have been an explosion with the ignition of the gas. Under different circumstances, the amperage could have caused a heart attack. This kind of task is very similar to tightening the lugs on a step transformer or the leads to a 440-volt three-phase motor.

Think about the jewelry you wear and take it off when you are at work if there is any chance of it conducting electricity, getting caught in machinery or catching on a handrail if you trip.

Remember, wearing a wedding ring sends the right message, but it can also be dangerous. By the way, the worker still has not told his wife about destroying his ring.

Always Assess the Risks — Stop and Think.