Ask Jon Eakes

Pro: Sheet metal tools for non-sheet metal workers

Last Updated: Thursday, March 28th, 2013, Created: Wednesday, November 29th, 2000

There are times when each of us has to do a little work outside of our own specialty. We usually know how to get by in someone else?s trade but we often don?t have the specialized tools that make things go so much easier. Sheet metal work is one of those area that I do only when I have too, but life has gotten simpler as I slowly collect a minimum of specialized tools.First, a sheet metal nibbler is not something that I could really justify in my tool box budget but there are often times when tin snips just won?t do the job. I learned to stock up on fine tooth metal cutting jigsaw blades and then to run the saw at high speed to overcome the vibrations of the thin metal. So much for the straight lines.The one special cutting tool that is worth buying, if you find yourself regularly cutting round holes in sheet metal because of our increasing work with ventilation ducts, is a hole cutter like the Malco HC2. This is a simple drilling and side cutting bit in a rig with a center pin to give us neat holes from 2 to 12 inches in diameter. Use your own electric drill to drive it.For bending corners and edges in sheet metal I finally broke down and bought what I call a pair of duck bill pliers, but is really called a hand seamer. The Vice-Grip ones can be found in most large hardware stores. They are not as efficient as specialized parallel jaw metal bending equipment, but they get me by in the odd job.As you know when working with sheet metal conduit and downspouts, there are male and female ends to everything and when you cut that male end off, you are in trouble getting things to fit again. Although you can purchase a whole set of very specialized crimpers that can perfectly and quickly reproduce the variety of factory ends ? guys like you and me can get by with just one or two of the simplest crimpers.The Malco SC1 Pipe Crimper is the least perfect but still very useful hand crimper as it will make just one male pleat at a time in the end of just about any ducting. Work your way around and the pieces will fit together well.For rectangular downspouts, there is the SC2 Downspout Crimper that puts that neat little pleat right in each of the four corners of the downspout.While we are talking about ventilation ducting ? are all of you having the problem that a Halifax contractor complained to me about? A 6 inch duct will not go well through a 6 inch hole in the wall ? but nobody seems to have a 6-1/4 inch hole saw. Not so. Malco Vent Saws exist but are only sold in the states and are very expensive. So I finally convinced the Starrett Co. to bring in a metric 160mm hole saw from Europe, which just happens to be 6-1/4 in diameter, perfect for ventilation ducts, at least through wood and other non-masonry materials. Any store that sells Starrett hole saws can order the 160 mm saw at a reasonable price. Consumer pressure does sometimes work.**Originally published as an article by Jon Eakes in Home Builder Magazine, the magazine of the Canadian Home Builder's Association.

Keywords:
Sheet Metal, Duct, Techniques, Tools