

In Your Face: Tablesaw Dust Control



Q My tablesaw blows a lot of dust and chips in my face when I'm ripping. Do you know of any kind of inexpensive dust hood similar to the one on your Excalibur overarm guard?

A Though you could surely cobble together a low-cost tablesaw dust hood yourself, it might be the last thing you need right now. When your fence is tuned parallel to the blade as it should be, it leads a piece of wood into contact with the saw teeth only at the front of the blade. Ideally, the teeth at the rear of the blade should just brush the kerf walls without cutting into them at all. Now, there's no way shavings generated at the front of the blade are going to be carried in the gullets three quarters of the way around the circuit at 125 miles per hour, only to be ejected at last just when they're aimed right at you. Flying debris above the table can only be generated by saw teeth cutting into the wood at the rear of the blade, and that's not supposed to be happening. Sawdust hitting you in the face is a message, loud and clear—a message you need to hear, not cover up with a dust hood.

That sawdust is telling you that your fence or blade (or both) are misaligned—and that's something you need to correct right now. It's not just that you're working inefficiently, wasting more stock than necessary and leaving kerf marks on your wood (not to mention getting a face-full of trash). Even slight misalignment between fence and blade increases the chance of kickback, and since kickback is the proximate cause of the great majority of tablesaw injuries, it's worth whatever it takes to keep it from happening.

First, get a copy of Kelly Mehler's *The Tablesaw Book*. It's the best thing in print on tablesaws; Mehler understands and communicates safety issues more thoroughly anybody else writing on the subject. Make sure your blade is precisely parallel to your miter slots. Then align your rip fence almost perfectly parallel to the slots, setting it just a few thousandths wide at the rear of the table (barely the thickness of one or two pieces of letter paper, for instance), just to be absolutely certain that you can't possibly err in the other direction and pinch your stock between fence and blade. With that accomplished, the only source of sawdust in your face will be those pieces of solid wood that tend to spread forcefully or pinch shut on the blade as they're cut. The message from pieces like that is that you're safer cutting them on a bandsaw, where kickback is not an issue.