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Dangerous Jobs

Most workplaces take active steps to eliminate any potential hazards to their employees' health. Some jobs, however, have danger written directly into the job description. For adrenaline junkies a day in a cubicle can be utter torture. Hanging fifty feet off the ground or playing with fire? Now that's a way to make a living.

To spot a dangerous job that happens all around the city on a daily basis, just look up. On any given day high rise window washers are dangling precariously from rooftops armed with only squeegees and buckets of detergent. At first glance the average person might think the job of washing high rise windows is similar to washing residential windows, the only difference being how far away from the ground you are. In fact, there are a slew of extra factors to consider.

Long Nguyen, owner of the San

Francisco based window washing company, Josh Wash, says "The biggest enemy for us is the wind, especially in San Francisco. We try to start as early as possible in the morning before the fog rolls in. You don't want to be trying to wash a window that high up when you can't see what you're doing." Rain is a big factor. It takes an hour or two just to set up a systems of ropes and pulleys, and by that time mother nature might have decided to drop a few showers over the city. In that case a window washer has to continue working, but being extra careful not to slip up or lose their grip. Since every building is different it can take a while to figure out the quickest way to divide up the work. Nguyen jokes, "One of the best employees we had was an amateur rock climber who had majored in physics. It was the perfect combination because no matter the size of the job, he could figure out the most efficient way to get the job done." He adds,

"The perfect person for this job is someone who is physically fit and, more crucially, has a good sense of balance. After a while you learn how to angle the ropes properly, so he or she needs to be a quick learner and get a thrill out of hanging around outside. You definitely get the best view of the city and it beats sitting around an office all day."

Water isn't the only one of the four elements that can provide a treacherous way to make a living. Fire Pixies, a dance troupe, embodies the very essence of what it means to have a dangerous job. Imagine a group of people moving themselves around a stage in time to music, all the while jumping in and out of flames and, at times, performing the elusive art of fire eating. This is an adrenaline rush for even the most subdued audience member. The founder, Erin Glover, started the troupe in 2002 after being laid off from her job as a web designer in the

post dotcom gloom that hit San Francisco. Having been trained as a martial artist and an amateur fire dancer for several years, she decided to put her hobby at the forefront of her priorities and thus Fire Pixies was born.

Fire Pixies also teaches workshops on fire eating, for which there is a surprisingly high interest here in the Bay Area. Glover says they get all different types of people, but especially those who work in the performing arts. The troupe performs for private parties, corporate events, and local shows. In recent years they have started taking the act on the road, traveling as far away as Japan to perform for audiences who don't usually know what they are in for when they buy tickets to a Fire Pixies show. As Glover says, "Everybody's favorite part of the show is the fire eating. Most performances that involve fire eating usually do it in a comedic way, but we do it in a much more

sensual way. We also do a lot of fire contact and drag trails of it along the dance floor. It is pretty amazing to watch."

Of course the most obvious question one would ask a high rise window washer or a fire dancer is simply why they would choose this as a way to make a living. Glover sums it up best by saying, "I love performing. I get all kinds of different people in the audience. Kids especially light up at what we're doing. Most people don't think you can stick a flaming torch inside your mouth. What I like most of all is that it seems like I am redefining the line between what is possible and impossible."

Just remember, these activities are for the workplace only. Whatever you do, don't try this at home.