

Kiln Corner

Start with the Simplest Kiln Repairs

by Arnold Howard

Photography Courtesy of Paragon Industries, LP.

Though Arnold Howard works for Paragon Industries, L.P., the information here applies to all brands of glass kilns. Feel free to send questions for this column no matter what brand of kiln you own.

When a kiln stops firing, people usually assume they will need new elements or other expensive parts, but often the problem is minor. The following story illustrates that very well.

Look Beyond What Seems to Be the Problem

Dannon's 48 amp kiln has three Low-Medium-High type switches. During a recent firing, when Dannon turned the top switch to High, the circuit breaker tripped. The same thing happened during the next firing, so Dannon replaced the top kiln switch.

During the third firing, she turned the top switch to High, and within 15 minutes, once again the breaker tripped. This time she changed the top element and installed new push-on terminals on the wires that connect to the top switch.

Dannon asked for suggestions, and I said she should replace the breaker. When an electrician took out the 70 amp circuit breaker, he found that the two wires connected to it were loose—one was very loose. "He went ahead and changed out the breaker," Dannon said, "but he told me to keep the old one, as likely nothing was wrong with it, just a poor connection.

"The kiln appears to work fine now," Dannon added, elated. "The electrician stayed for quite a while to watch the kiln crank up and test the amps. Whew! About time for this saga to end."

Start with the Basics

Remember this story, which applies to all brands of kilns, if anything goes wrong with your kiln. Before replacing parts, look for the simplest repair solutions.

1. Before changing a dead element, check the switch-to-element wires. Do you see a loose wire? Has the element burned off at the element connector? If so, you probably don't need to buy a new element; just reconnect the old one.

2. In many cases, cracked or broken firebricks can be left alone. The damage is typically only cosmetic.

3. If the controller won't turn on, check the kiln's switch box fuse. (The fuse holder is mounted on the kiln.) Don't assume that you need a new controller.

4. If the temperature on your controller is suddenly inaccurate, you don't necessarily need a new thermocouple. Check to see if it's simply that the old one hasn't been pushed into the kiln wall.

Before replacing a thermocouple or controller due to an erratic temperature display, make sure the thermocouple connections are tight.



If the controller does not turn on, check the fuse in the kiln's switch box before returning the controller for repair.



Before assuming that the controller is inaccurate, make sure any objects such as a shelf are not too close to the thermocouple. We recommend a distance of 1" between the shelf and the thermocouple.

Arnold Howard writes instruction manuals and advertisements for Paragon Industries, L.P. His hobbies are glass fusing and karate. He also enjoys studying history and watching classic movies. You can reach Arnold at ahoward@paragonweb.com with questions for future columns. Sign up for his kiln newsletter at www.paragonweb.com.

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