

HOW TO  
UNIVERSAL

LASERS!

FRESH 23 AUGUST 2021

You are required to follow all current university guidelines for wearing masks while in the lab.

You are  
responsible for  
keeping our  
community safe!

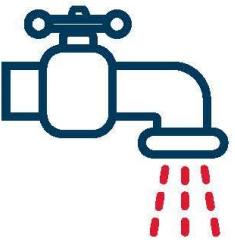


**COVER**

wear a mask  
when required  
on campus

THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC

Visit [go.gwu.edu/covid19](http://go.gwu.edu/covid19) for the latest updates and information about how the university is responding to COVID-19.



**CLEAN**

wash and sanitize  
hands often



**CONTAIN**

stay home  
if you're sick



# NOTE

This document is NOT  
a substitute for hands-on training.  
Ask your teacher  
or a lab tech for a tutorial.

This tutorial assumes you already have basic working knowledge of Adobe Illustrator.

If you've never worked with Illustrator before, a good place to start is to download it via Creative Cloud Desktop app (all Columbian students get this for free) and brush up on it in [LinkedIn Learning](#) (was lynda.com, also free to Columbian students). Search for courses on the more recent editions of illustrator.

The laser is quite safe to use, but it  
is powerful; using it requires your  
full caution, attention and respect.

Some rules of the road:

Rules of the road

No food or drink in the lab.

Rules of the road

**Clean up after yourself.**

If you brought it in with you, take it back out. Store materials and projects in your locker, in your studio, or someplace designated by your faculty. Keep the lab clean and uncluttered.

Rules of the road

If you're not sure...

DON'T!

Get the help you need,  
even if it means waiting.

Rules of the road

Don't bypass or disable any  
of the safety features.

These are Class 4 lasers which can instantly  
burn or blind you, even from reflections.

# Rules of the road

**Work in pairs.** It always helps to have a second set of eyes in case you miss a detail.

Rules of the road

**NEVER LEAVE THE LASER  
UNATTENDED WHILE CUTTING!**

If your material catches fire, the  
laser will shut down, but that  
doesn't put the fire out...

# Know where the fire extinguisher is located.

This is critical for the lasers. As you enter the room, it's right next to the door. Generally the on-duty lab tech will decide whether the fire extinguisher is called for, but you should know where it is.



**Know where the first aid kit is.** If an emergency occurs:

Life-threatening:

**call 911**

Physical safety:

**UPD 202-994-6111** (46111 from university phones)

Toxic spill:

**Health & Safety 202-994-4347** (44347 from university phones)

# Materials

The school will be providing common materials for class projects. This ensures we are only using safe, appropriate materials for the lab.

If you are working on a personal project outside of a class and need to source safe materials, contact Devin ([PaceD@gwu.edu](mailto:PaceD@gwu.edu))

The rule of thumb: if you can burn it with a cigarette lighter, it can be cut it with the laser (but that doesn't mean it's safe). All materials need to be approved by Devin ([PaceD@gwu.edu](mailto:PaceD@gwu.edu)) before you use them on the laser!!!!

# GOOD

Material	Raster Engraving	Vector Engraving	Vector Cut
Corrugated Cardboard	OK	OK	OK
Uncoated Paper	OK	OK	OK
Chipboard/Matboard/Museum board	OK	OK	OK
Resale Acrylic	OK	OK	OK
Interior Plywood	OK	OK	OK
Balsa Wood / Basswood	OK	OK	OK
Hardwoods (Domestic Only)	OK	OK	OK
Arries Board (Resale MDF)	OK	OK	OK
Masonite	OK	OK	OK
Resale Cork	OK	OK	OK
Resale Vegetable tanned leather	OK	OK	OK
Resale Muslin	OK	OK	OK
Unmounted Linoleum	OK	OK	OK

# BAD

Material	Banned Reason
PETG, PET	Along with other emissions, is known to emit Benzene which is known to cause cancer.
Polystyrene	Known to emit styrene fumes.
ABS	Emits cyanide gas and tends to melt.
PVC	Emits chlorine gas during a cut.
Bending Plywood	Bends into the path of the laser carriage during operation.
Tropical Hardwoods	A lot of tropical hardwoods have toxins in the wood.
Corian	Creates a fine grit inside the laser bed and will grind down equipment
Casting Wax	Melts a lot.
Nylon	Emits toxic fumes.
Vinyl	Emits chlorine gas during a cut
Delrin	Along with other emissions, is known to emit Benzene which is known to cause cancer.
Foamcore	Foamcore is an expanded polystyrene and is known to emit styrene fumes when cut.

**Bring extra material for testing.**

Especially if you are new to the laser, or are trying a material you've never used before, it may take some trial and error to get the settings right.

Oversized material for the laser?  
Cut it down to 18" x 24" BEFORE  
you bring it into the lab.

This includes cardboard, chipboard, wood,  
EVERYTHING. Not trained in the woodshop?  
The woodshop techs are happy to train you  
OR cut your materials down for you.

What about glass and metal? Our laser isn't powerful enough to cut metal,\* but can mark metal using a special compound applied to the surface. It can't cut glass either, but can engrave it by creating micro-fractures.

\*There are caveats to both of these, but beyond the scope of this tutorial.

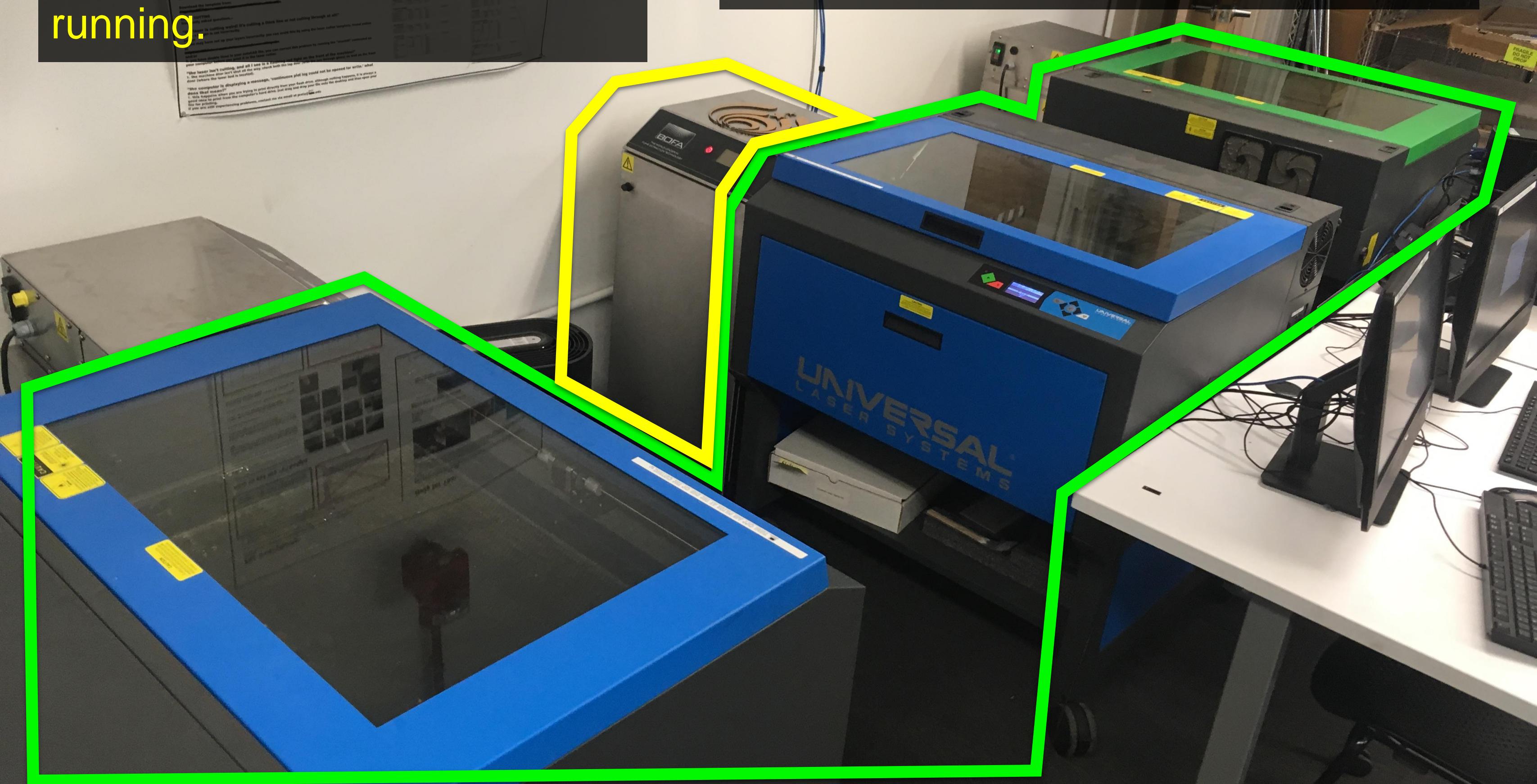
Not sure?

Ask your instructor, the lab tech, or  
contact Devin ([PaceD@gwu.edu](mailto:PaceD@gwu.edu)).

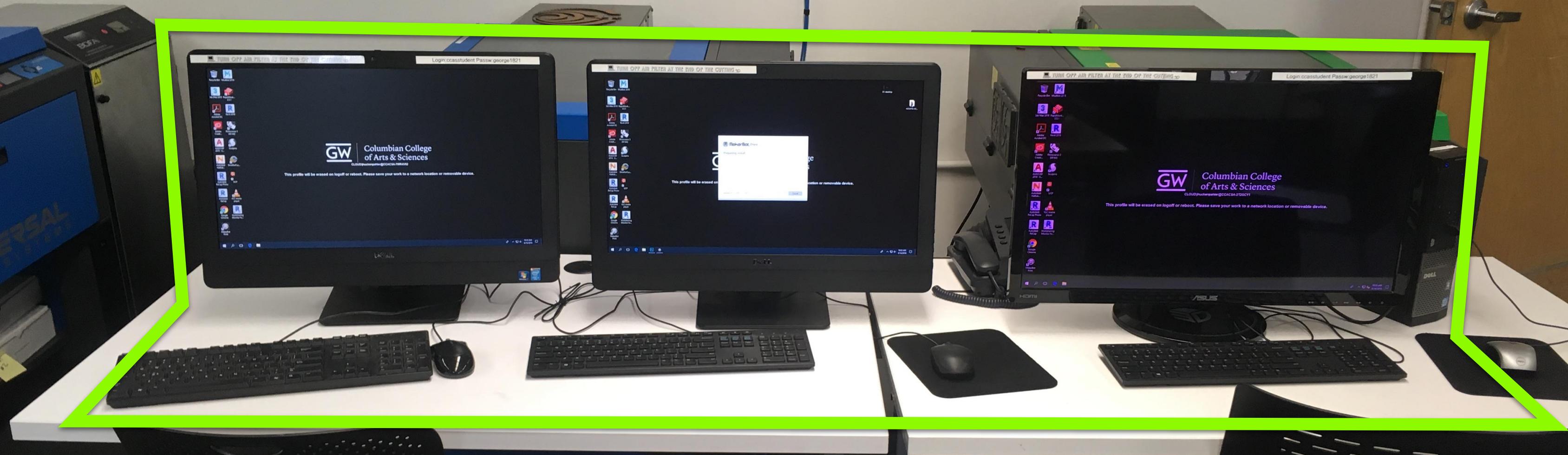
the laser stations

These devices extract the fumes from the laser while it is running.

and slightly more powerful, but all three work the same way.



These three computers have the software for the laser; they are the only ones that can send jobs.



Prep your files on other machines,  
not on the computers connected to  
the lasers. You should be ready to  
open a finished file, send to the  
laser, and jump off when done so  
you're not holding up other people.

# Workflow



Recycle Bin



Revit 2015



AI

VLS 4.60



Adobe Acrobat ...

Rhinoceros 5  
(64-bit)

Adobe FormsCentral



Sculptris

AutoCAD  
2015 - E...SketchUp  
2015Autodesk  
123D CatchStyle Builder  
2015

Autodesk 360



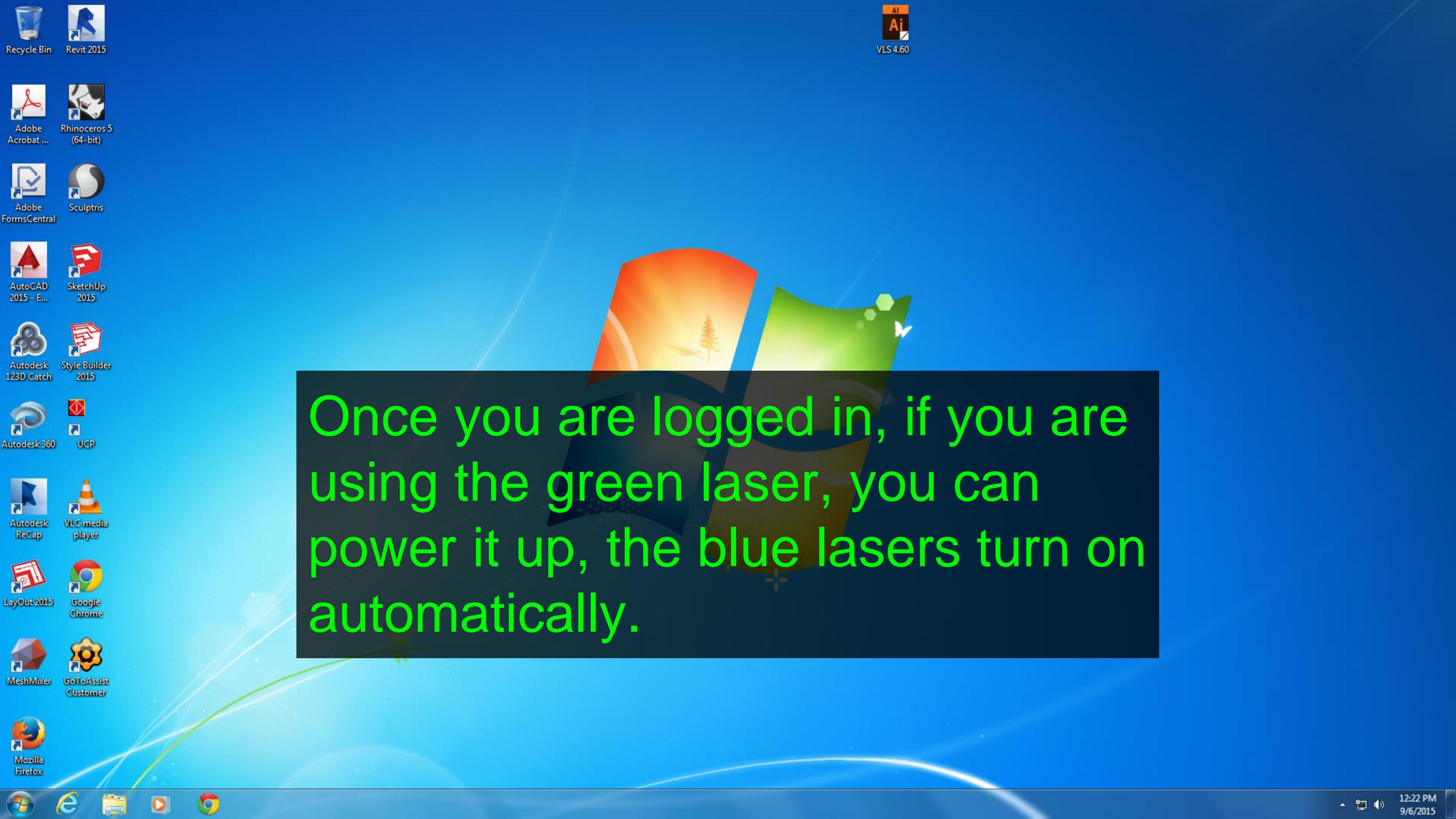
UCP

Autodesk  
ReCapVLC media  
player

LayOut 2015

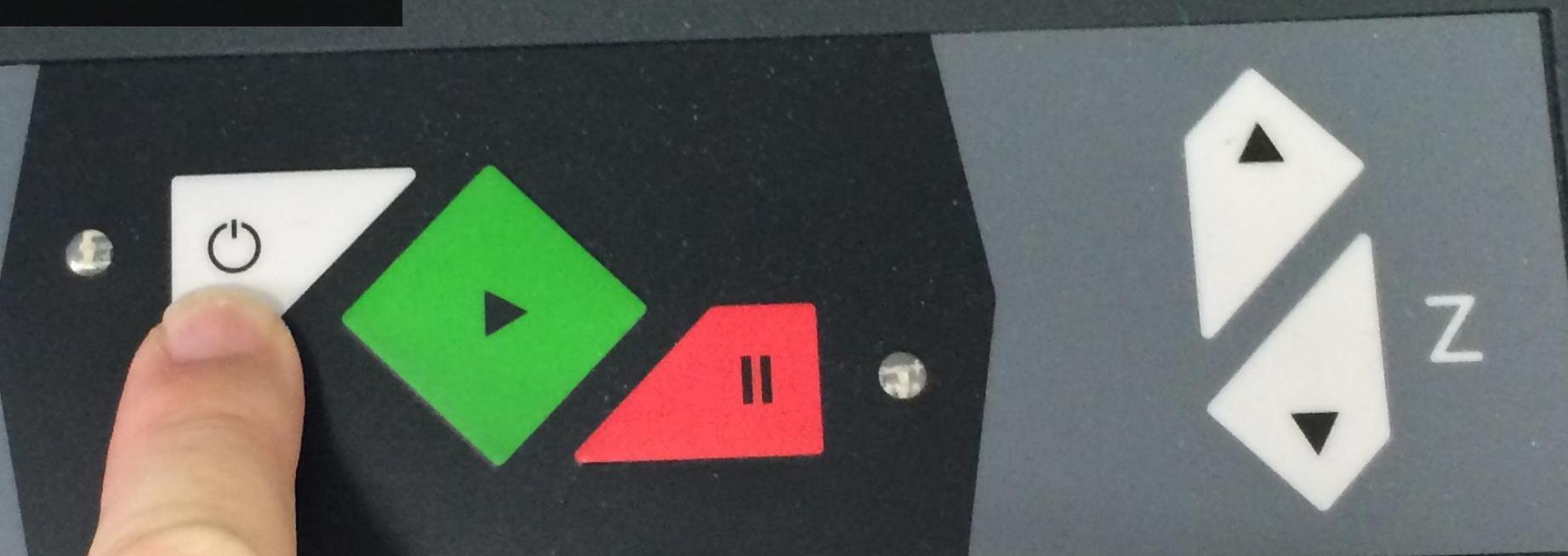
Google  
Chrome

MeshMixer

GoToAssist  
CustomerMozilla  
Firefox

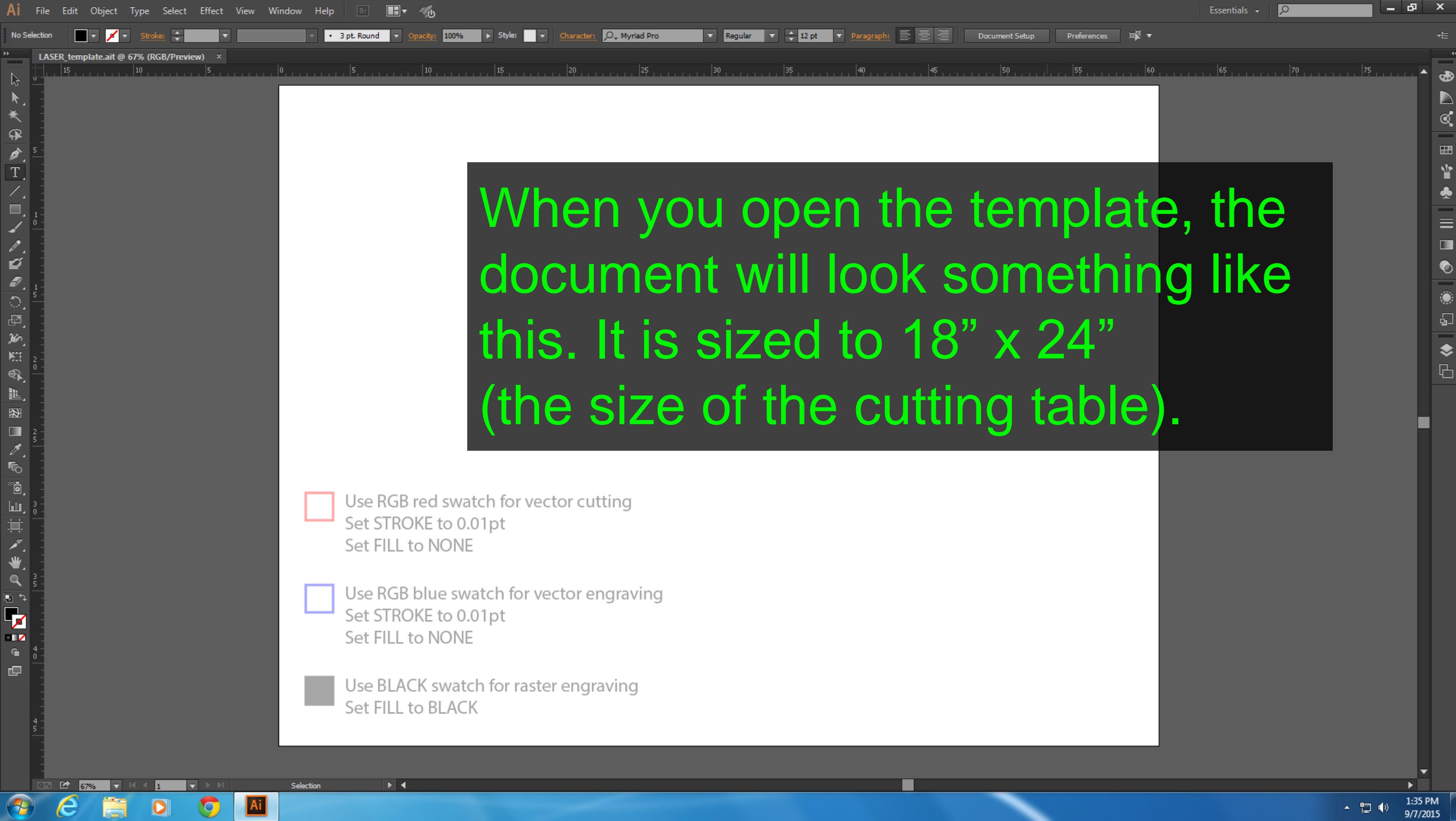
Once you are logged in, if you are using the green laser, you can power it up, the blue lasers turn on automatically.

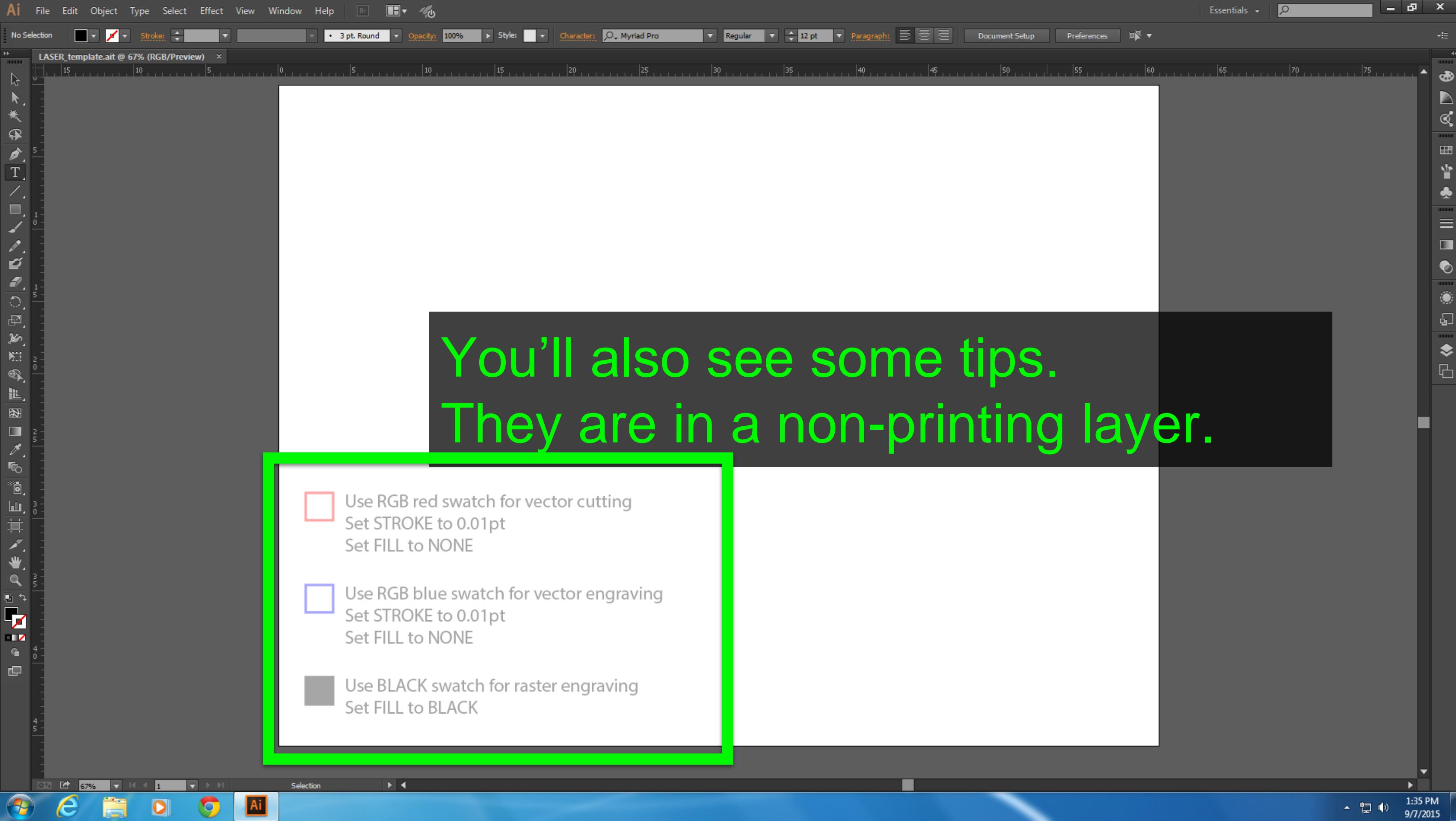
Power on the laser if  
it's not already on.



For general use, it's easiest to print from **Adobe Illustrator**. We've created an Illustrator **template file** that's set up to work with the laser. The template should be on the desktop. Ask a lab tech if you need help.

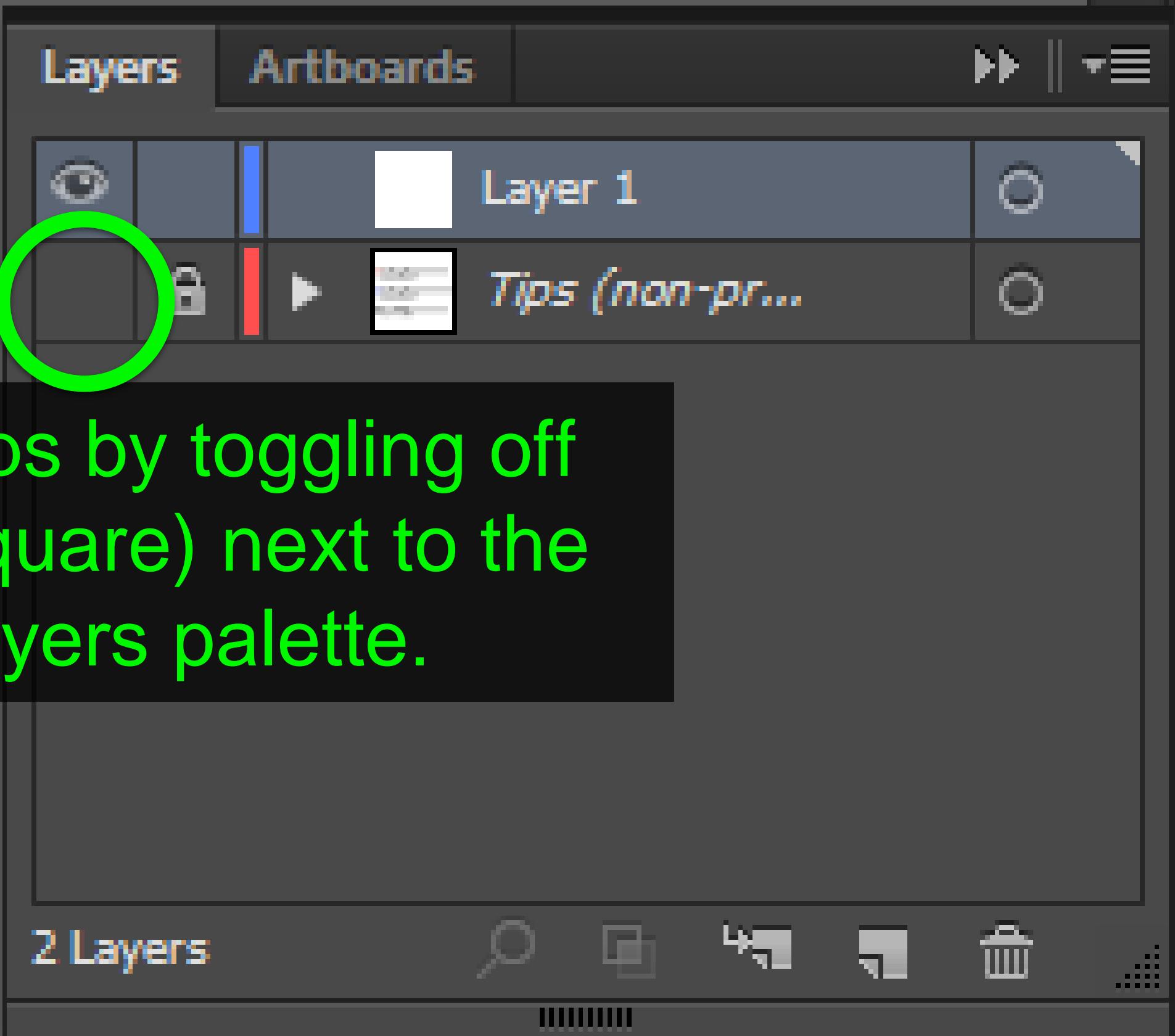
[Https://go.gwu.edu/csadlasertemplate](https://go.gwu.edu/csadlasertemplate)





perform specific functions. These colors are very important. The whole document needs to be converted to RGB (which the template

- Use RGB red swatch for vector cutting  
Set STROKE to 0.01pt  
Set FILL to NONE
  
- Use RGB blue swatch for vector engraving  
Set STROKE to 0.01pt  
Set FILL to NONE
  
- Use BLACK swatch for raster engraving  
Set FILL to BLACK



You can hide the tips by toggling off the 'view' icon (a square) next to the 'Tips' layer in the layers palette.

The laser can do  
**three basic things:**

vector cut

vector engrave

raster engrave

If you want to **cut clean through a material**, you use vector art to specify a path that the laser will follow. Vector art is typically created in programs like Adobe Illustrator.

If you want a clean hairline that is engraved on the material, but not cutting all the way through, you will vector engrave. Again, you are specifying a path that the laser will follow using vector art.

If you want to mark a material with anything other than a hairline without cutting through, you will raster engrave. Any vector art that has a fill, a stroke greater than 0.01pt, or raster art (anything with pixels) will raster engrave.)

Let's see all three in action...

Stroke:

1 pt

Uniform

Basic

Opacity:

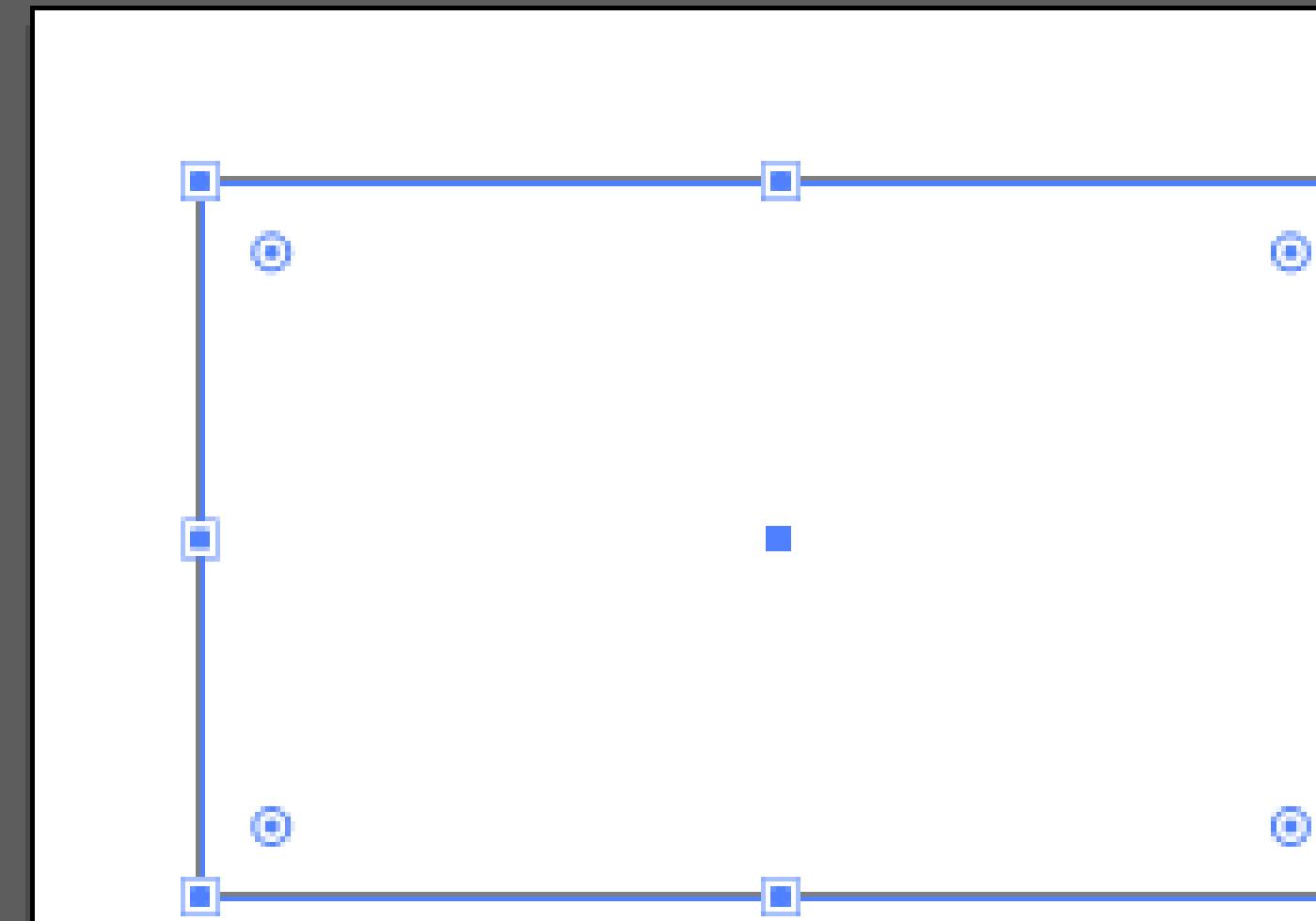
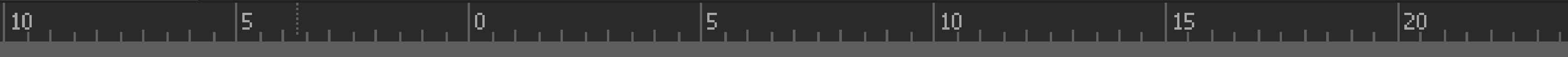
100%

Style:

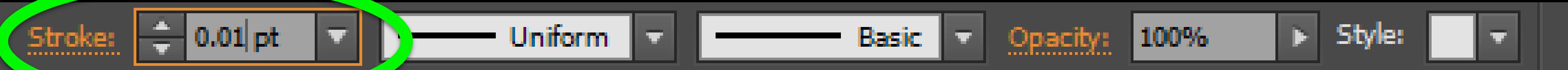


Shape:

3/Preview) X

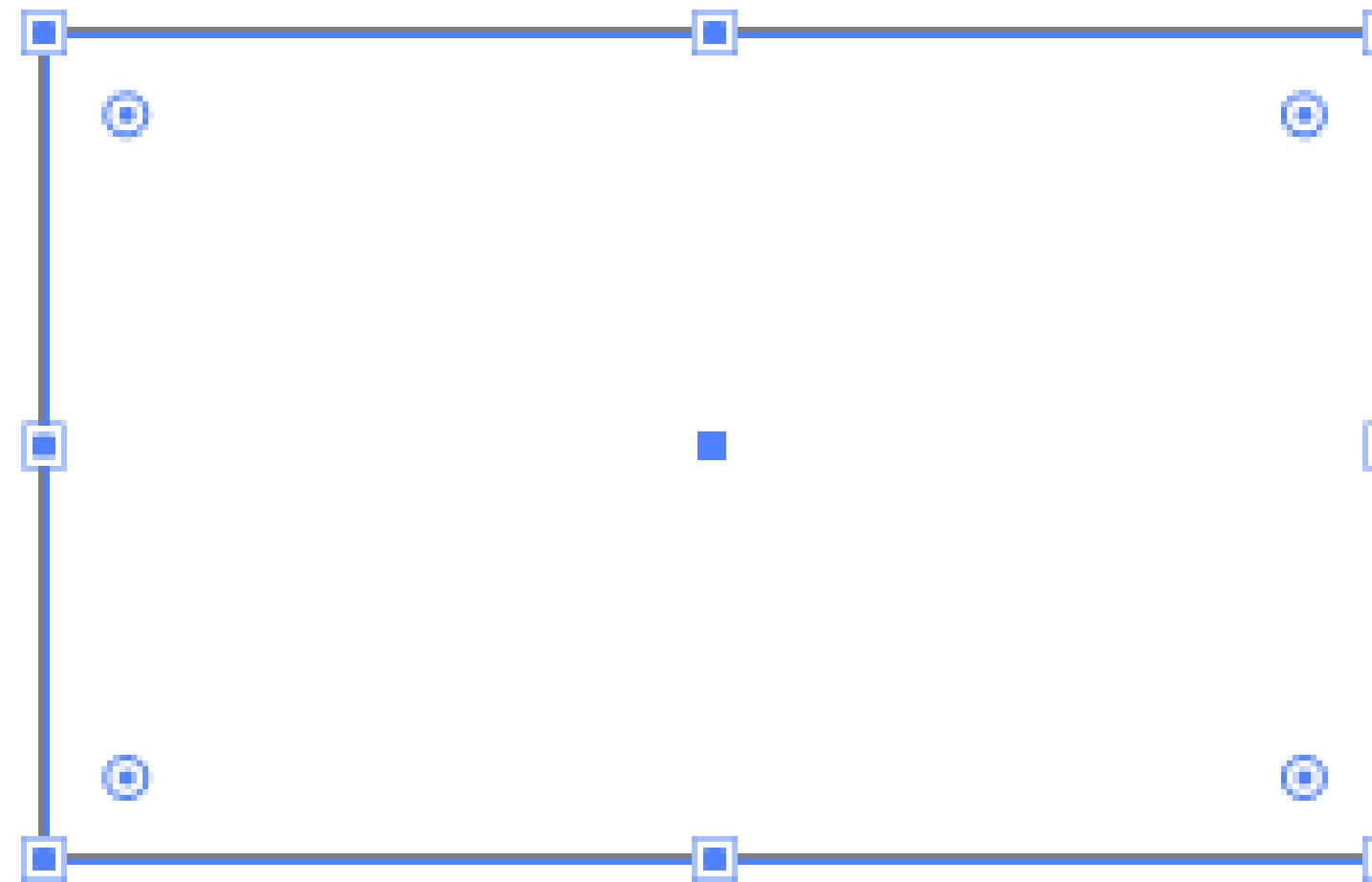


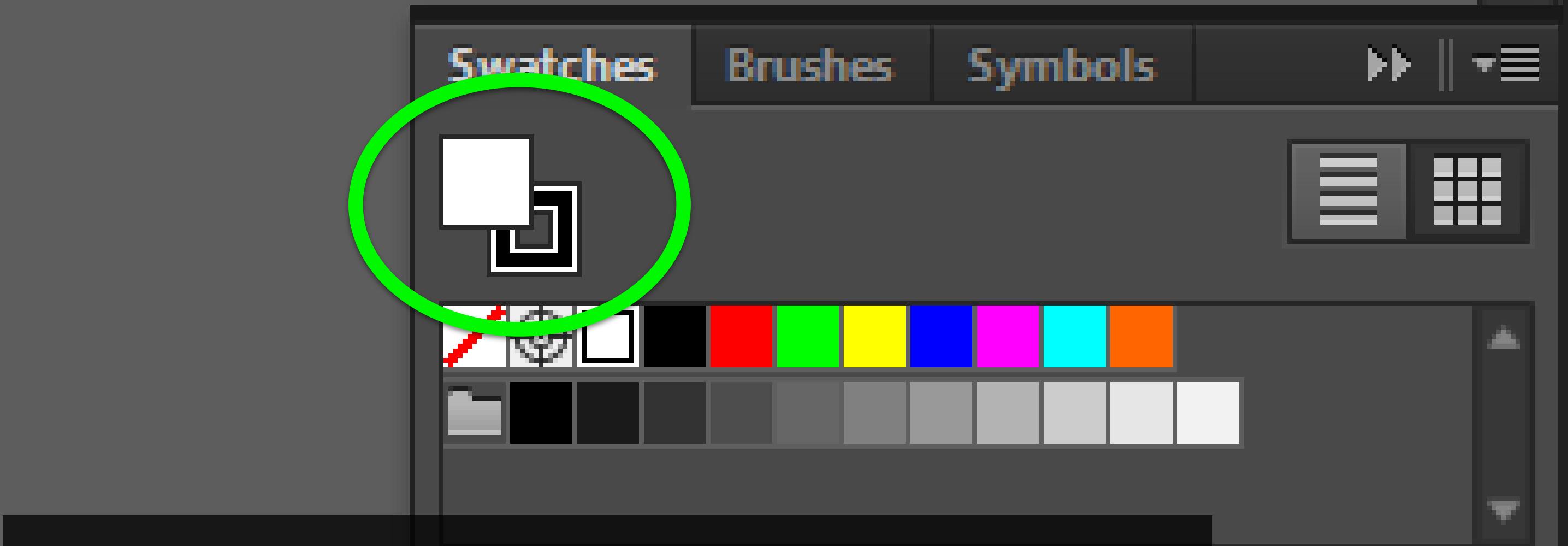
I'll start by drawing a rectangle...



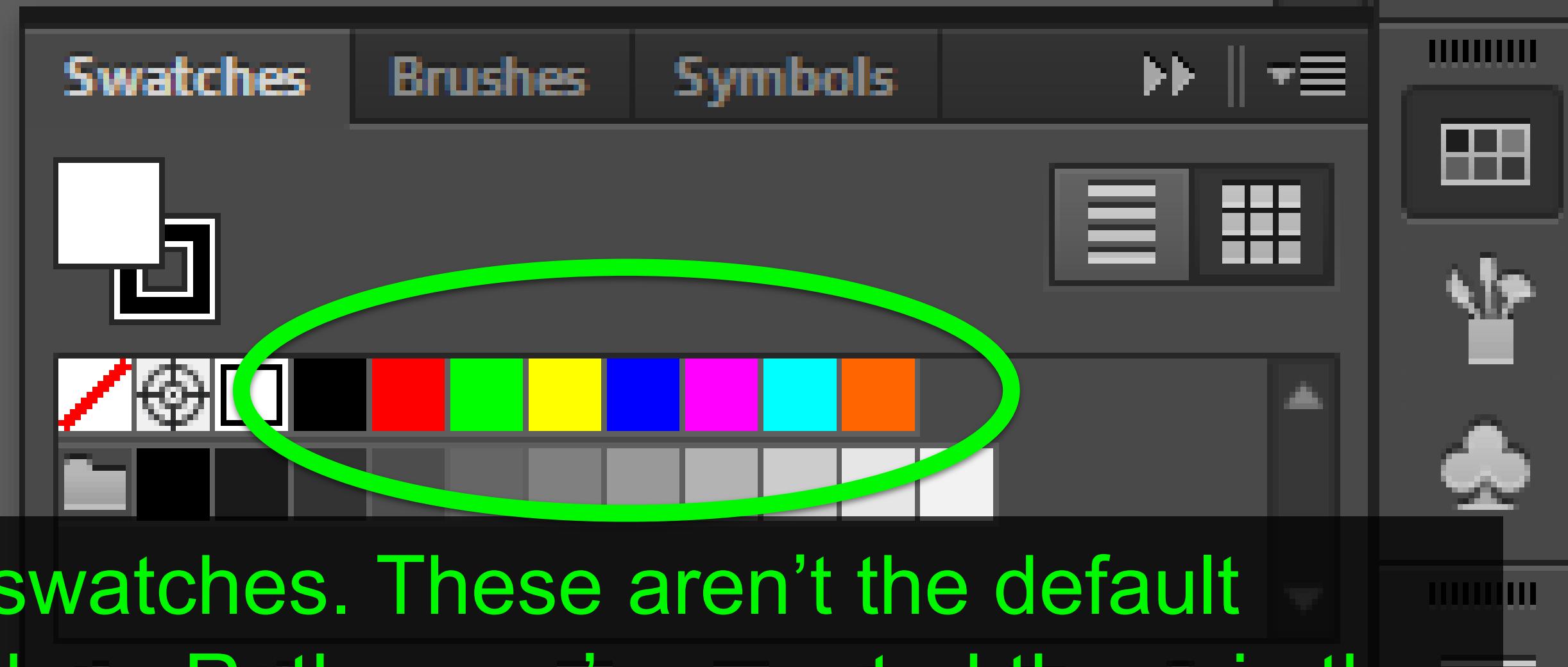
(/Preview) 10 5 15

We want this to be a cut, so we'll set the STROKE to 0.01pt.





We need to change the FILL and STROKE colors as well. (The defaults, WHITE and BLACK won't give us the right results.)

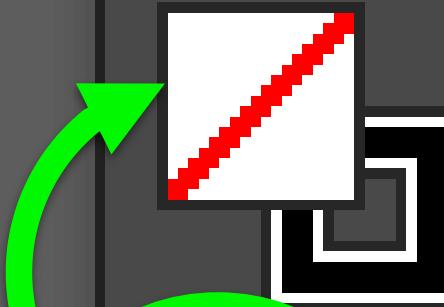


Notice these 8 swatches. These aren't the default illustrator swatches. Rather, we've created these in the template file because they are specific RGB values that the laser software knows. For the purposes of this tutorial, the specific swatches you care about are RED, BLUE, and BLACK.

**Swatches**

**Brushes**

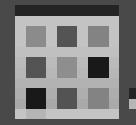
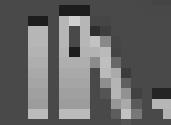
**Symbols**



For cutting, set the FILL to **NONE**.

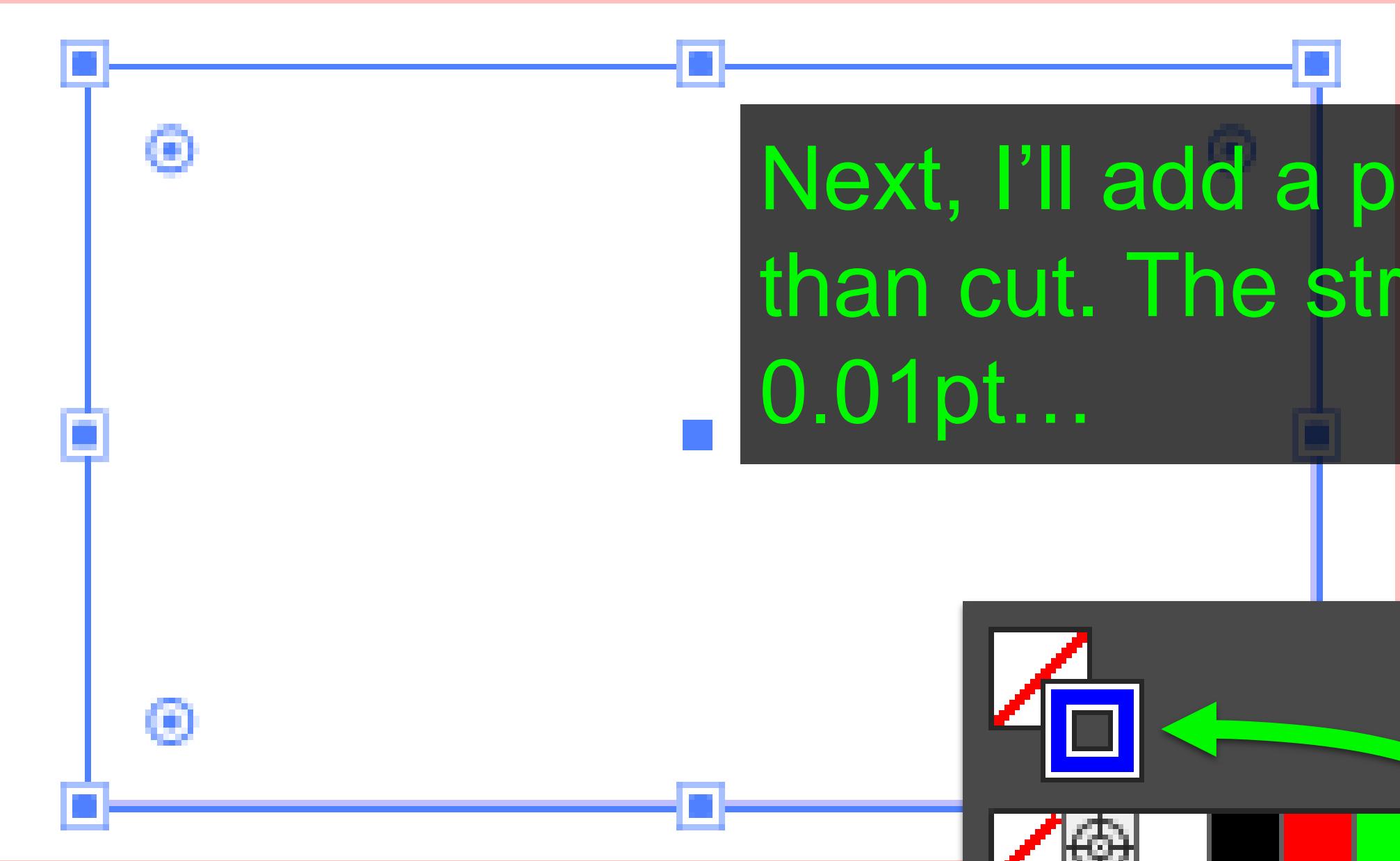


**[None]**





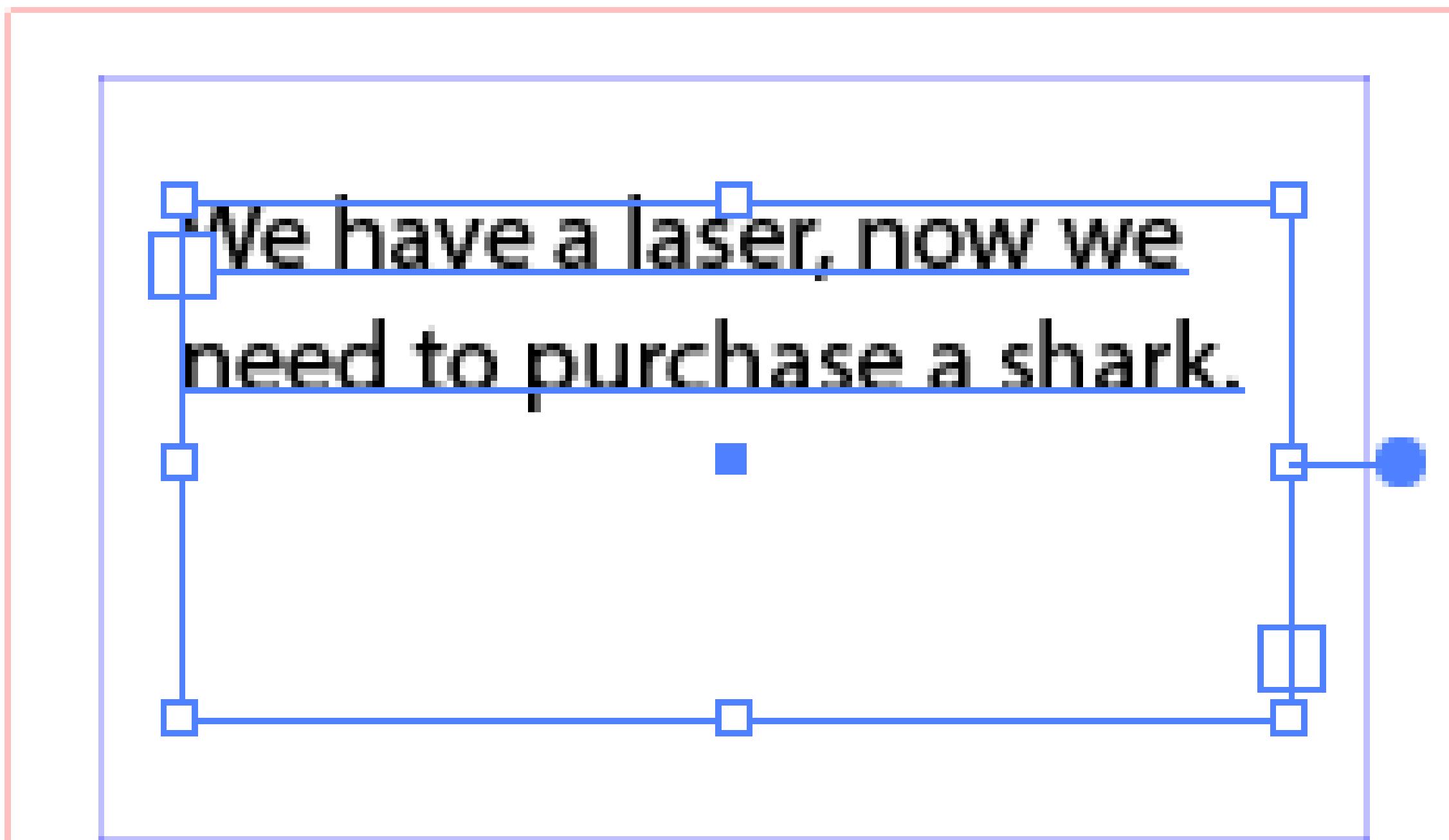
And set the **STROKE** to **RGB RED**.



Next, I'll add a path to engrave, rather than cut. The stroke width is set to 0.01pt...



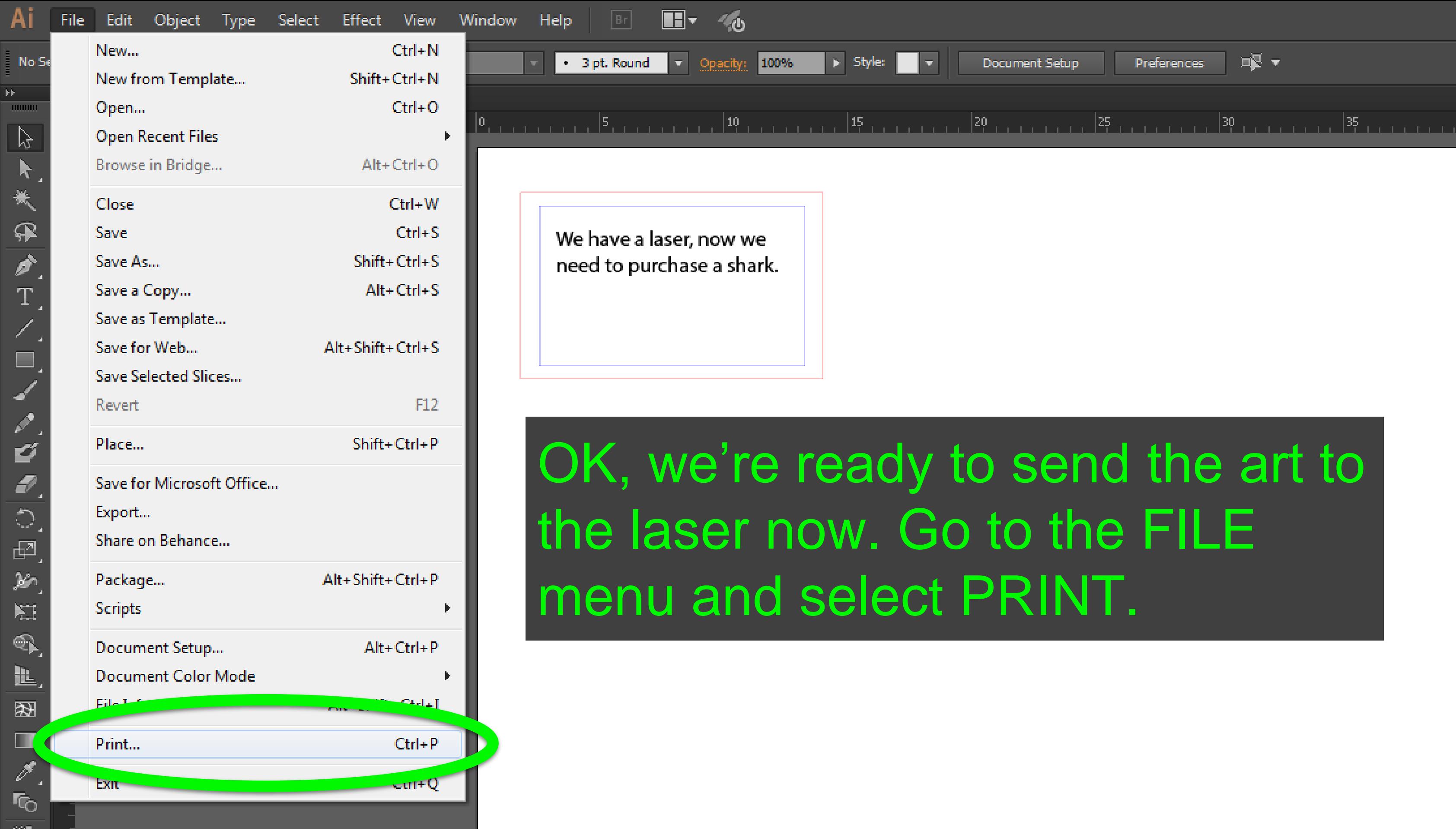
... and set the **STROKE** to **RGB BLUE**  
with the fill to None.

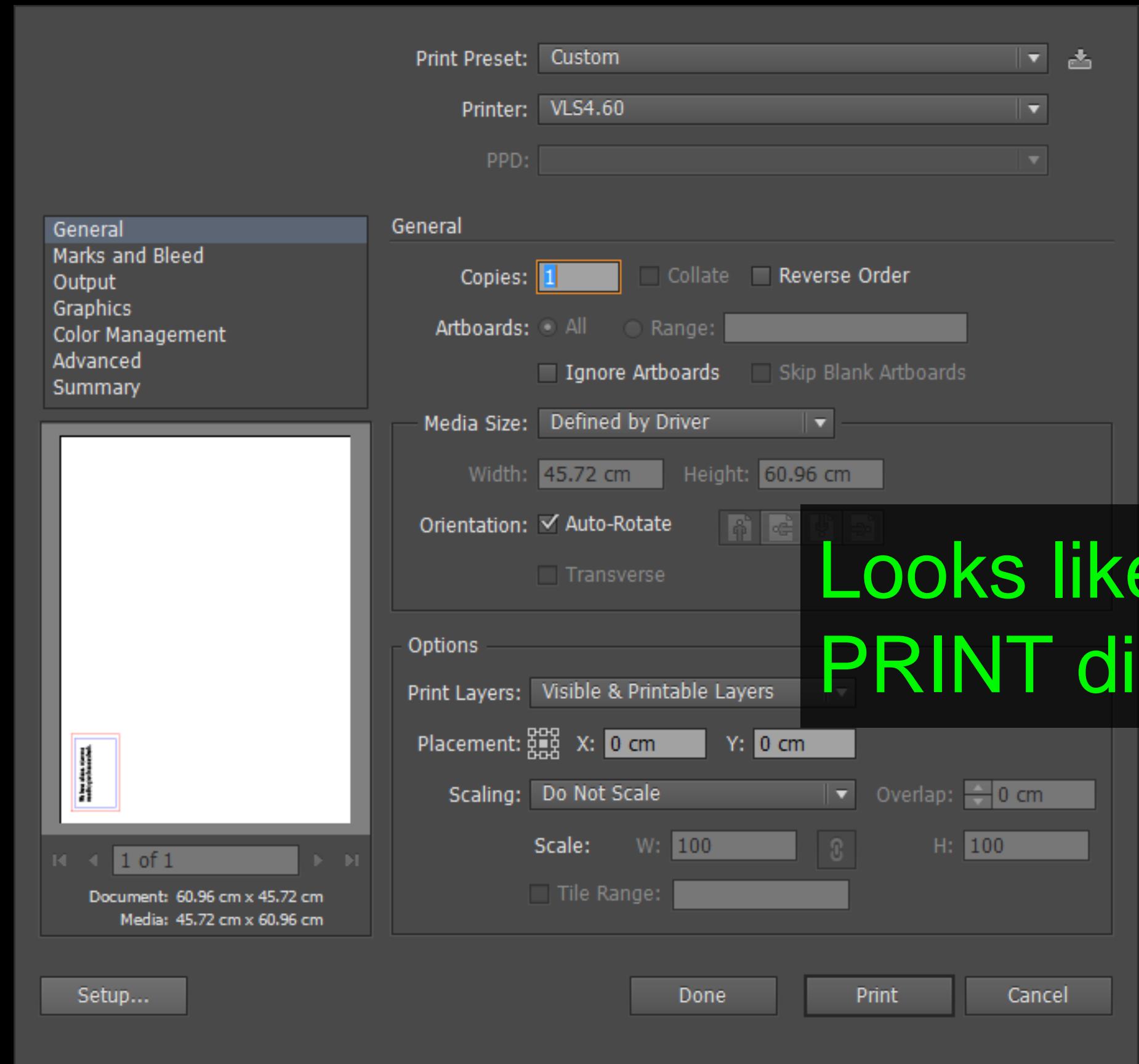


We have a laser, now we  
need to purchase a shark.

Finally, I'll add some text. It has a BLACK fill and no stroke.

Remember, anything with a FILL,  
no matter what color, will  
automatically turn into a raster  
engraving. Same goes for anything  
with a stroke greater than 0.01pt.



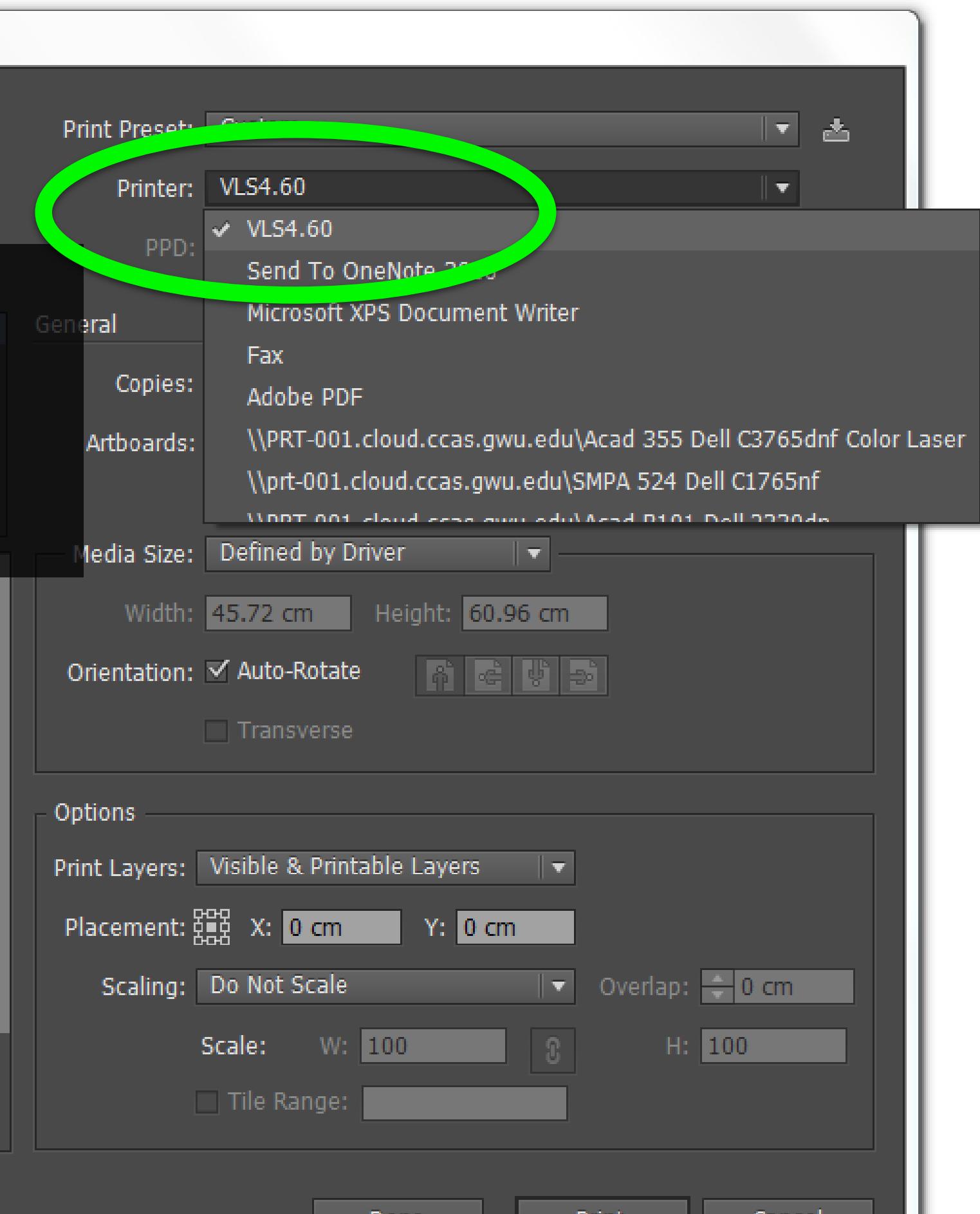


## Print

Make sure 'Printer' is set to one of the lasers.

Use RGB red swatch  
Set STROKE to 0.0  
Set FILL to NONE

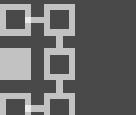
Use RGB blue swatch  
Set STROKE to 0.0



Transverse

## Options

Print Layers: **Visible & Printable Layers** | ▾

Placement:  X: 0 cm Y: 0 cm

Scaling: **Do Not Scale** | ▾

Scale: W: 100

Tile Range:

◀ ▶ 1 of 1

Document: 60.96 cm x 45.72 cm

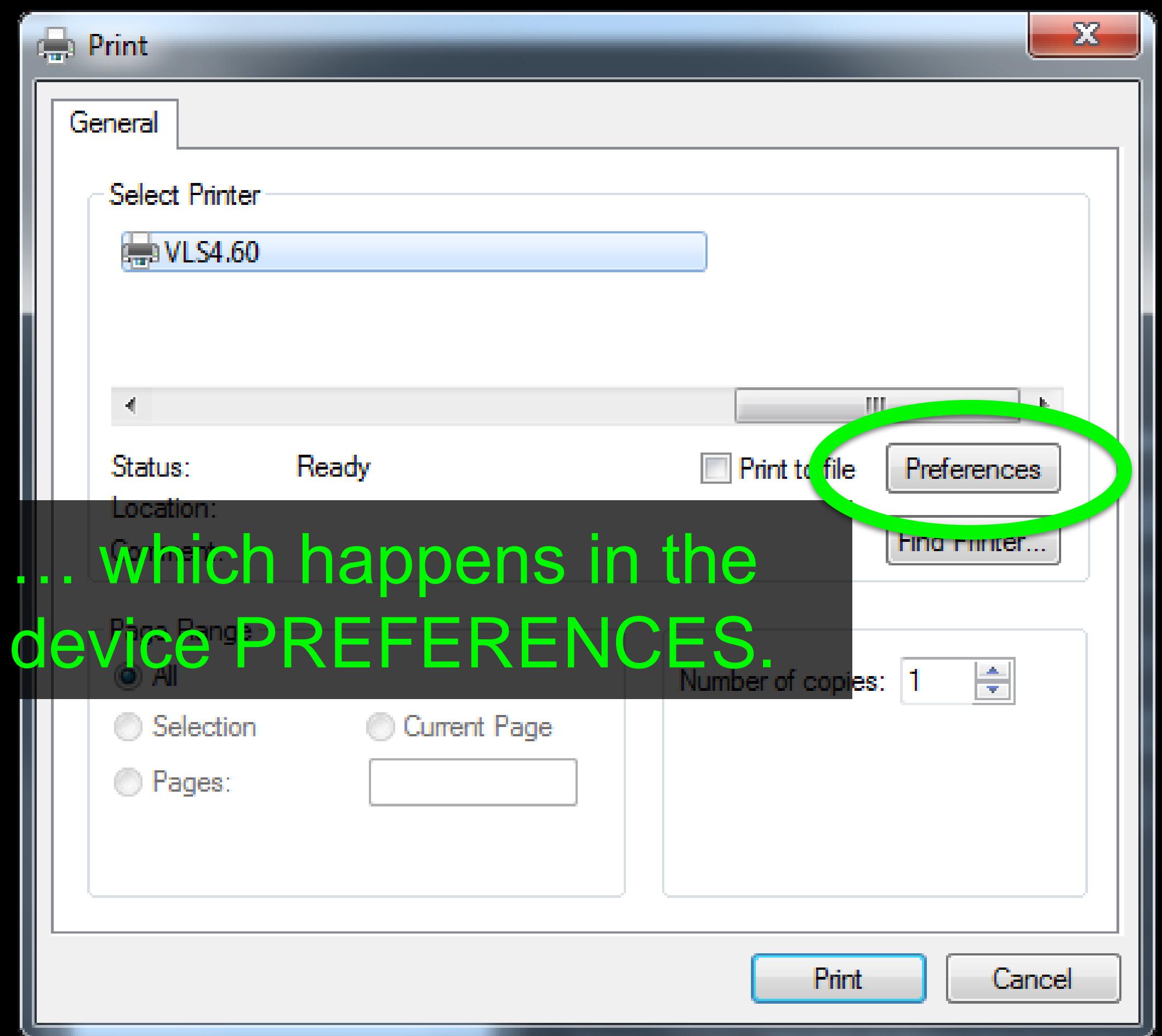
Media: 45.72 cm x 60.96 cm

Setup...

But we need to change  
the SETUP...

Done

Print



## Laser Settings for VLS4.60

Selected:

**Find****Next**

- Materials Database
  - + Ceramic
  - + Fabric
  - + Foam
  - + Glass
  - + Metal
  - + Natural
  - + Plastic
  - + Rubber

Click to select material, double-click to edit, right-click for other commands.

Notes:

Print Special Effects

3D

Setup

Material Thickness

 Merge Pages

Print Direction



Vector Performance

Standard

Units

- Metric
- inches

Fixture Type

NONE

## Intensity Adjustment

Raster



Vector Engraving



Vector Cutting



This SETTINGS window is where you specify the material you are using, and its thickness.

Materials Database

Manual Control

## Laser Settings for VLS4.60

Selected:

Find

Next

- Materials Database
  - + Ceramic
  - + Fabric
  - + Foam
  - + Glass
  - + Metal
  - + Natural
  - + Plastic
  - + Rubber

Click to select material, double-click to edit, right-click for other commands.

Notes:

Print Special Effects

3D

Setup

Print  
Direction



Standard

Intensity Adjustment

Raster



Vector Engraving

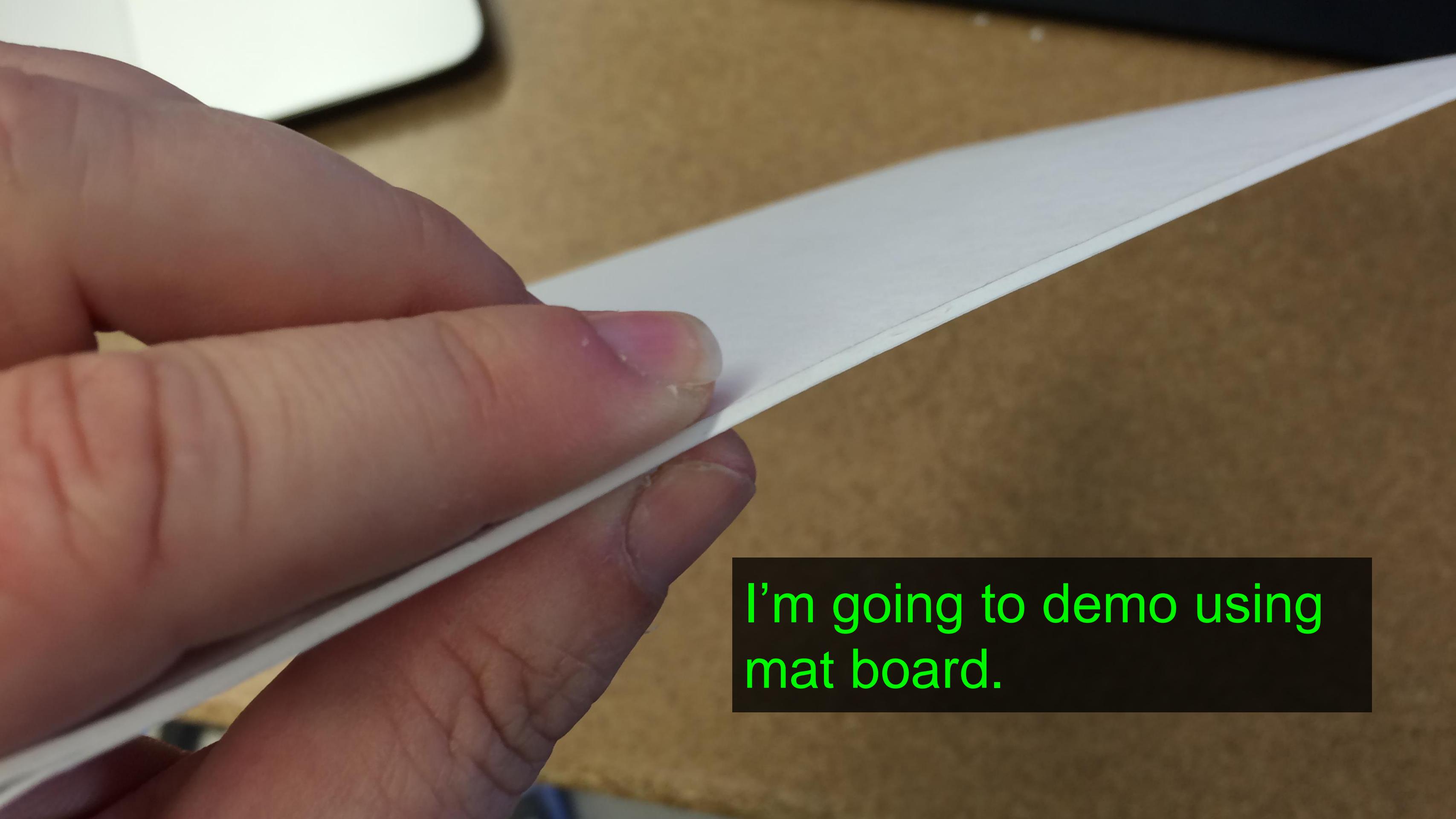


Vector Cutting



Here are the materials  
you can work with.

What about other materials that aren't in the database? Custom settings can be created for other materials, but that's beyond the scope of this tutorial.

A close-up photograph showing a person's fingers holding a long, thin strip of white material, likely mat board, at an angle. The strip is positioned diagonally across the frame, from the bottom left towards the top right. The background is a light-colored wooden surface. In the bottom right corner, there is a black rectangular box containing green text.

I'm going to demo using  
mat board.

## Laser Settings for VLS4.60

Selected: Standard Material Mat Board 350250

**Find****Next**

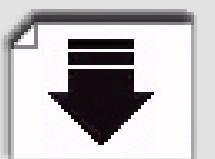
- Natural
  - Cork Board
  - Leather
  - Mat Board
  - Mother of Pearl
- + Paper
- + Stone
- Vellum
- + Wood
- + Plastic

It turns out mat board is in  
the database.

Click to select material, double-click to edit, right-click for other commands.

**Notes:****Print Special Effects**

Normal

**Print  
Direction****Vector Performance**

Standard

**Intensity Adjustment****Raster****Vector Engraving****Vector Cutting**

Click to select material, double-click to edit, right-click for other commands.

Notes:

Print Special Effects

Normal

Material Thickness

0.063 "

Merge Pages

This is the default thickness. Is it correct? Important, because the laser needs to know what depth to focus on.

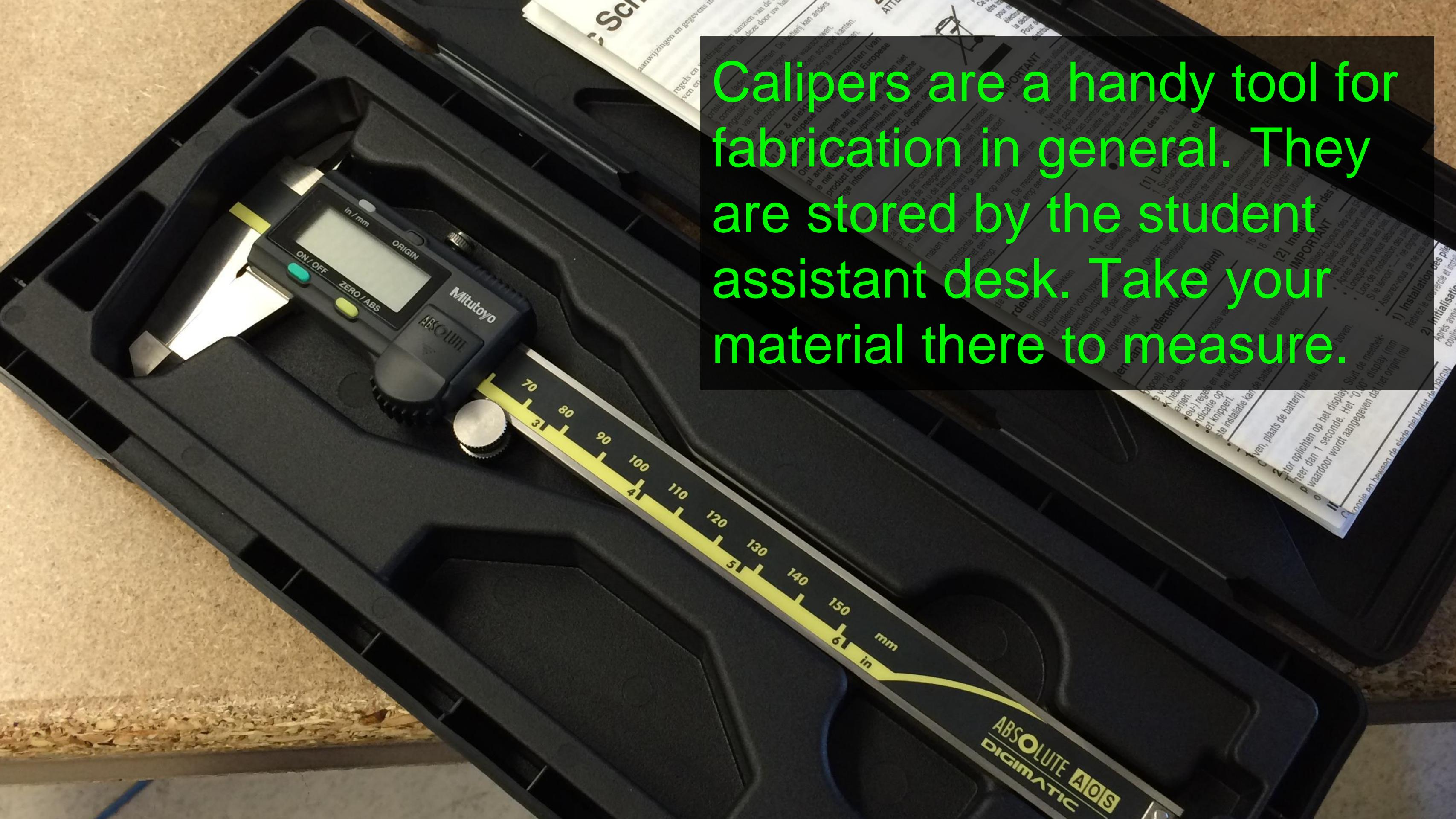
Units

- Metric
- inches

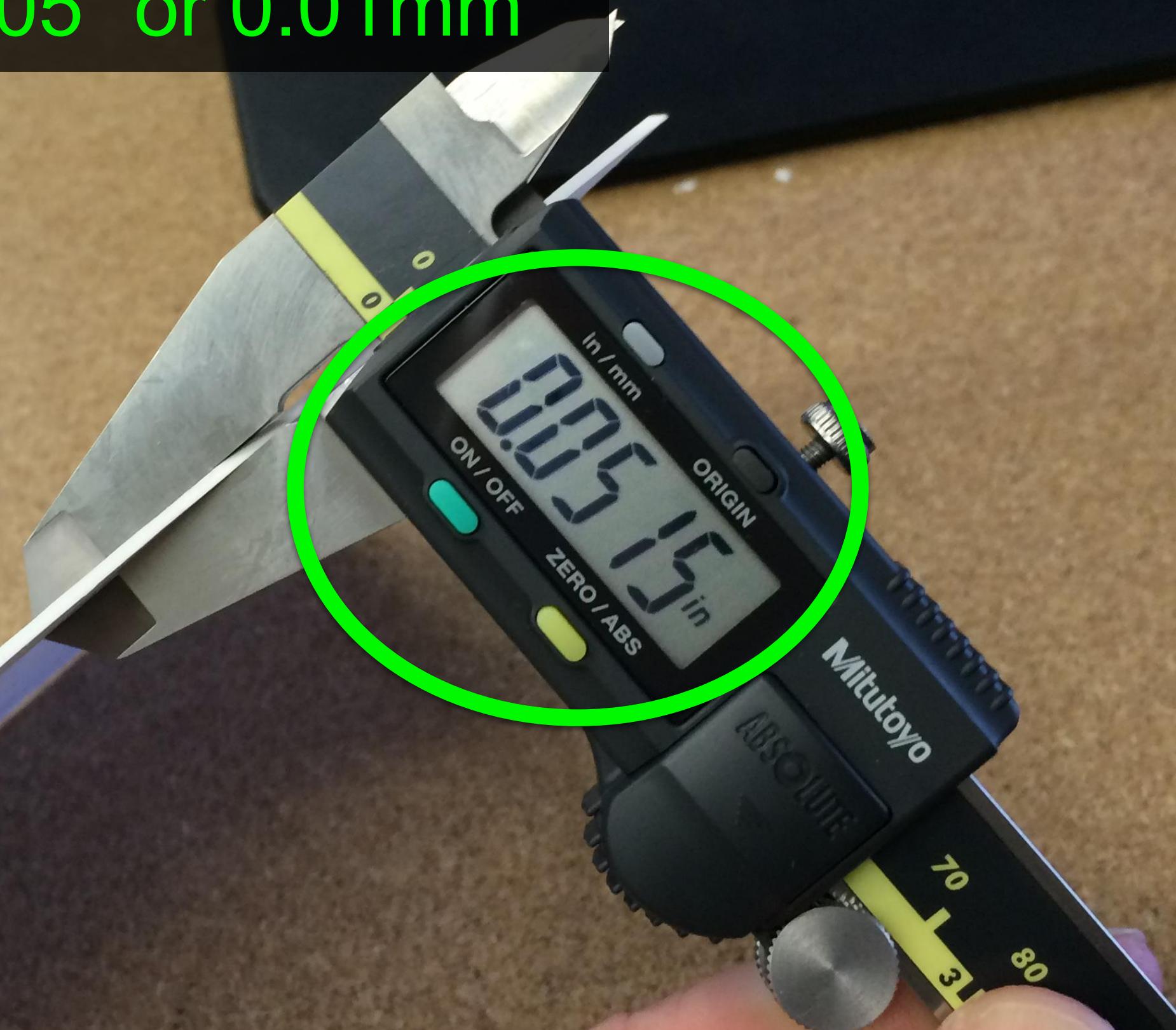
Fixture Type

NONE

Calipers are a handy tool for fabrication in general. They are stored by the student assistant desk. Take your material there to measure.



Precise to 0.0005" or 0.01mm



Notes:

Print Special Effects

Normal

Material Thickness

0.051 "

Merge Pages (Manual)

Put in the correct thickness.

The software rounds to 3

decimal places for inches and  
two for millimeters. (Notice you  
can change units.)

Units

Metric

inches

Fixture Type

NONE

click for other commands.

## Vector Performance



Standard



### Fixture Type

NONE



OK!

Apply

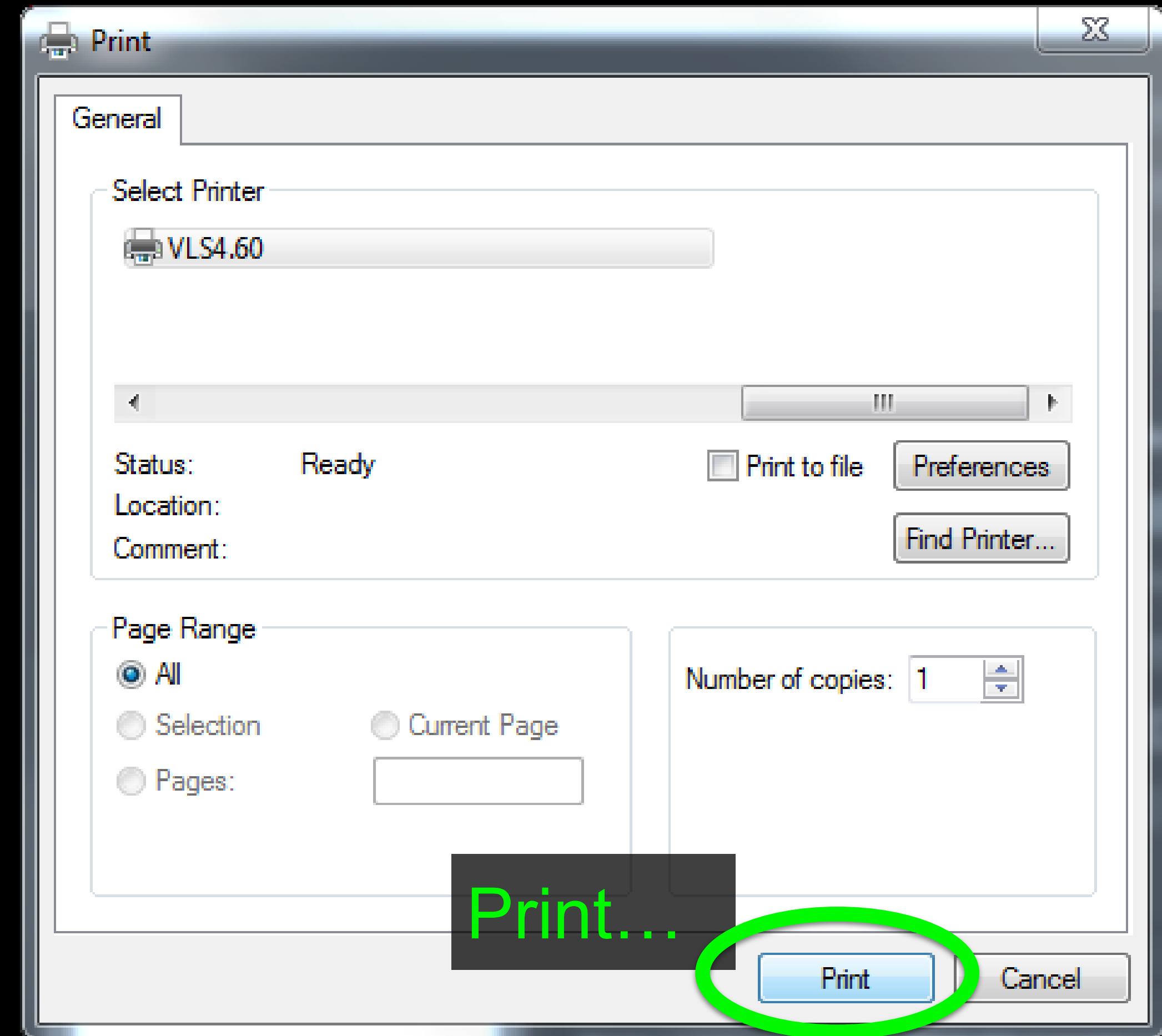
Load

OK

Defaults

Save

Cancel



Width: 45.72 cm

Height: 60.96 cm

Orientation:  Auto-Rotate



Transverse

### Options

Print Layers: Visible & Printable Layers

Placement: X: 0 cm Y: 0 cm

Scaling: Do Not Scale

Overlap: 0 cm

Scale: W: 100

H: 100

Tile Range:

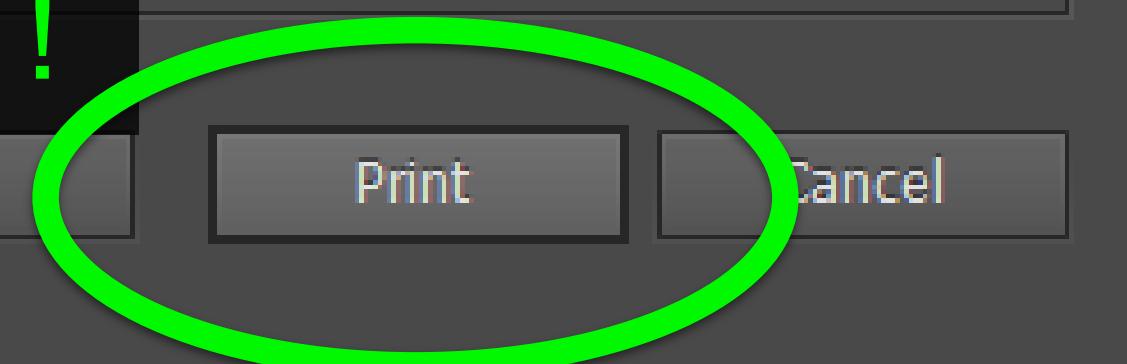
Really... PRINT!

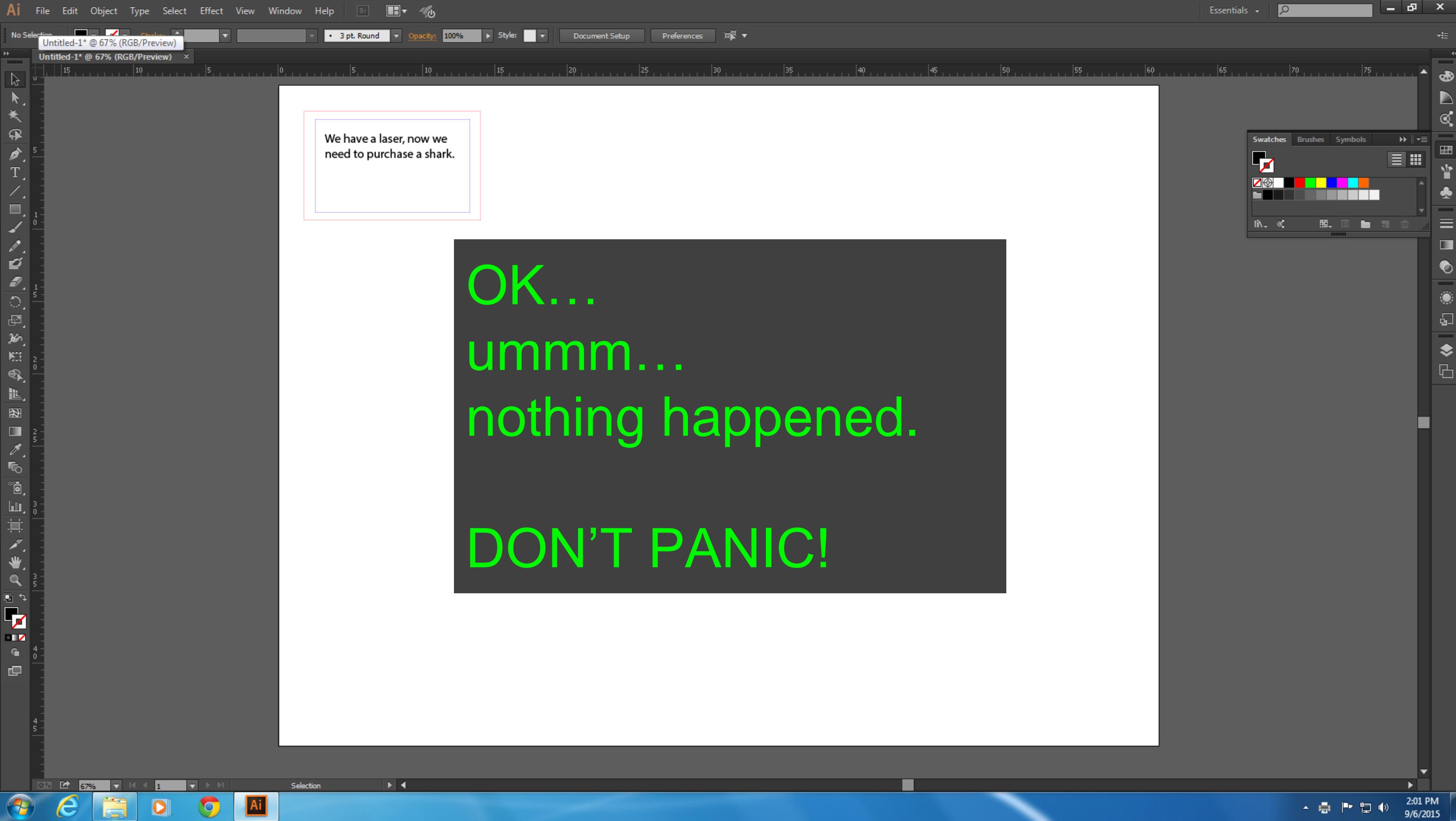
Setup...

Done

Print

Cancel



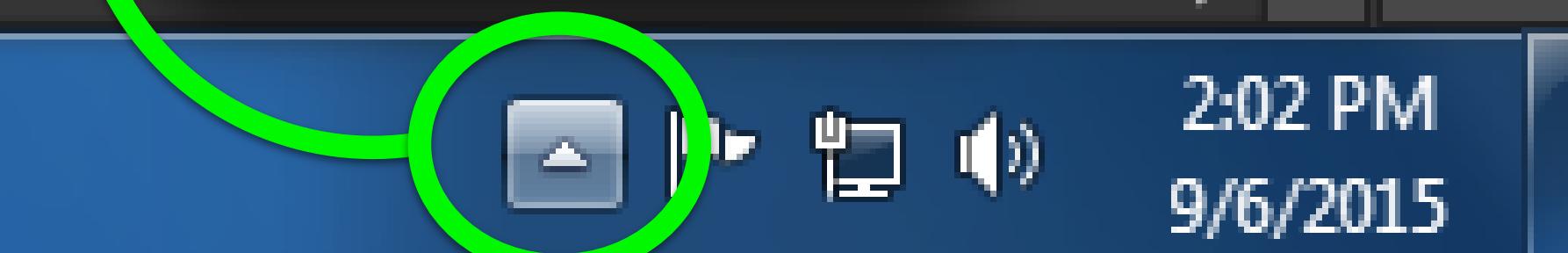
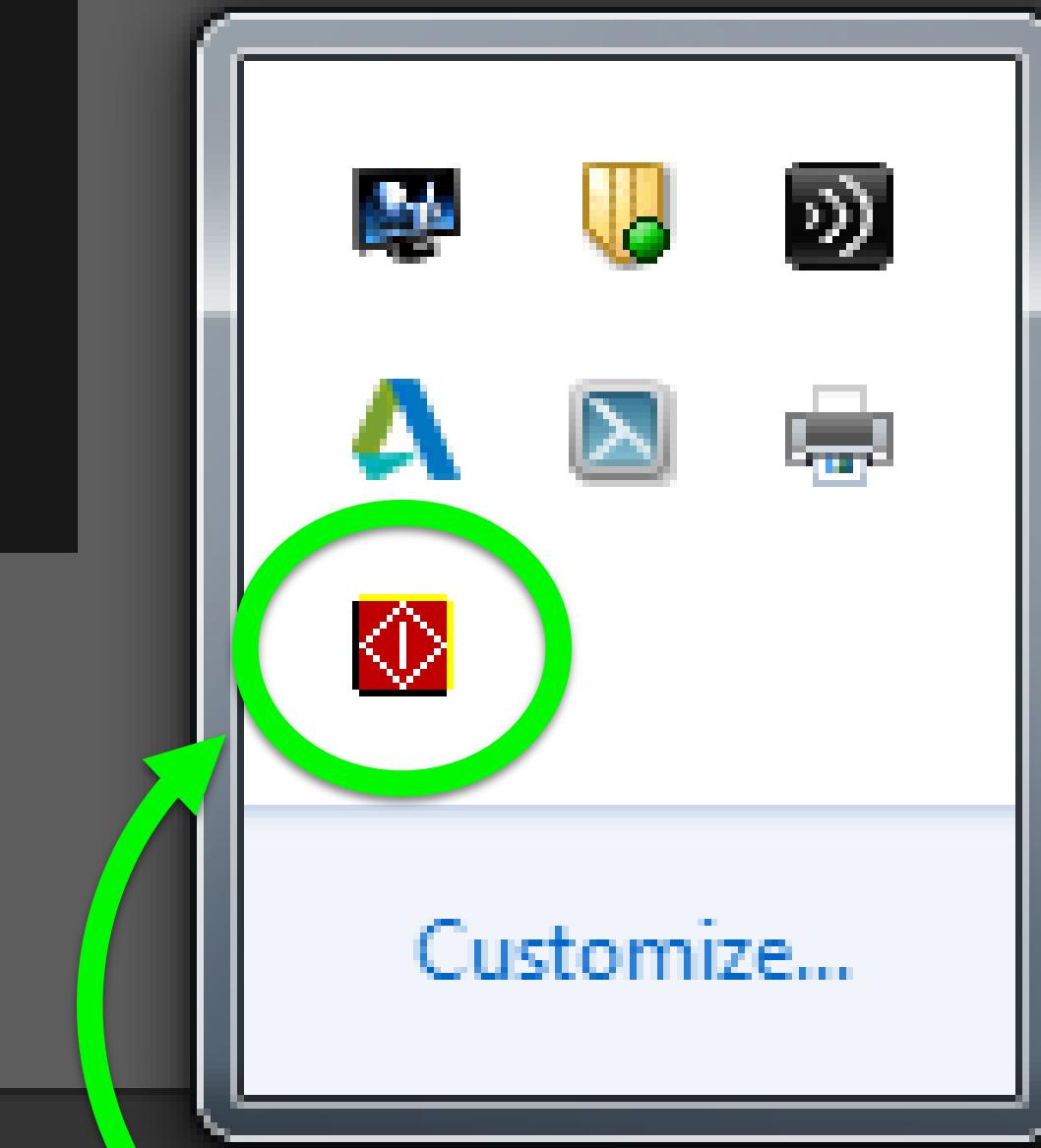


We have a laser, now we  
need to purchase a shark.

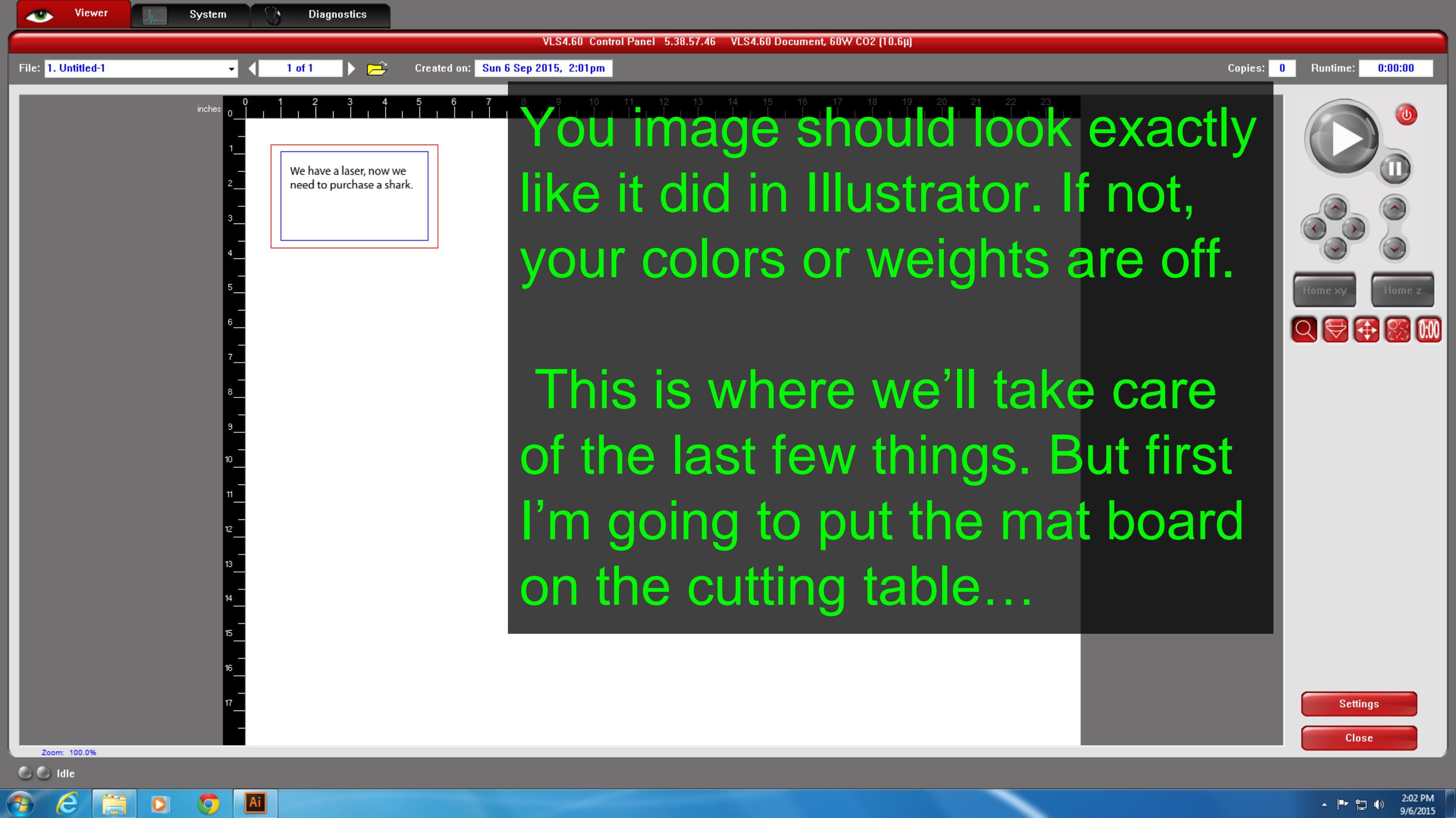
OK...  
ummm...  
nothing happened.

DON'T PANIC!

Because we need to go  
the laser's control panel.  
It's found in the dock at  
the bottom of the screen.

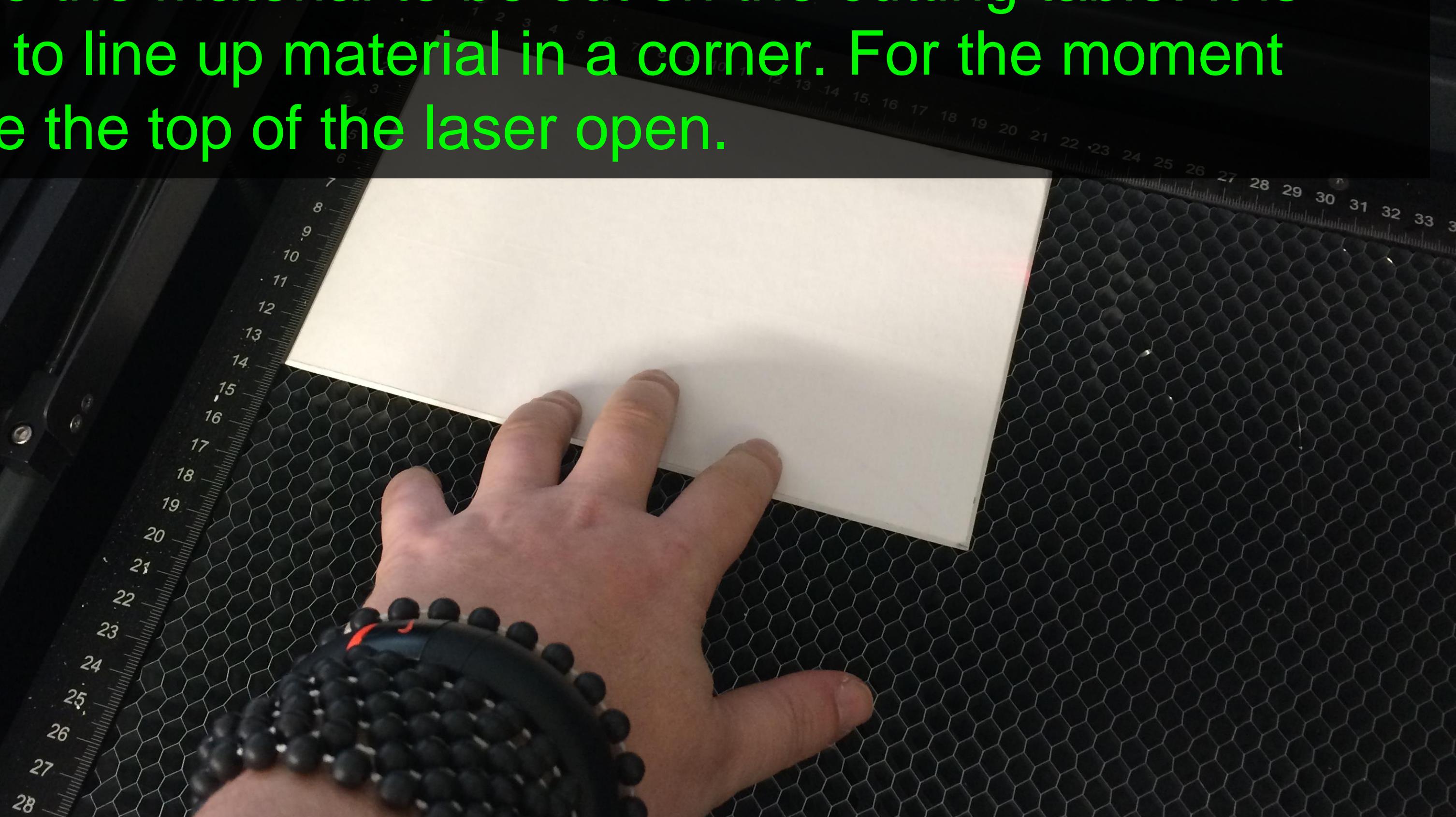


2:02 PM  
9/6/2015



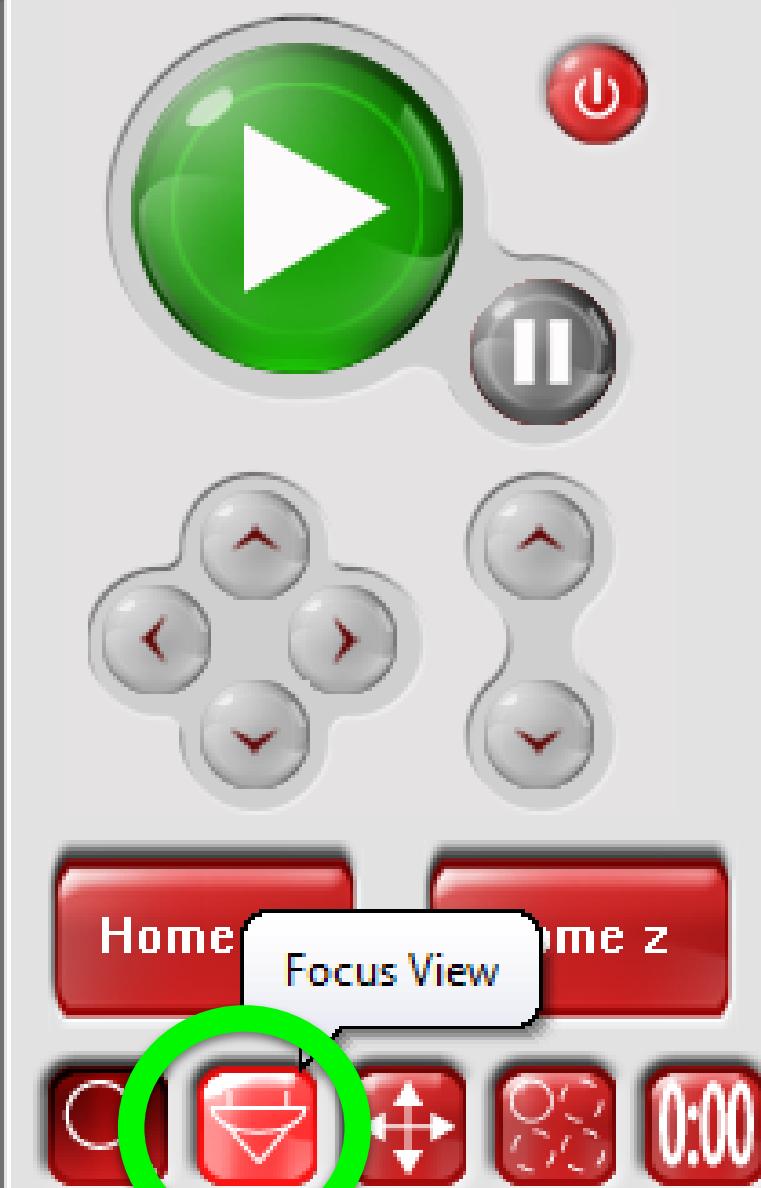
Gently lift the top of the laser.

Place the material to be cut on the cutting table. It is best to line up material in a corner. For the moment leave the top of the laser open.



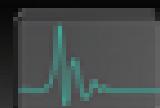
15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23

Back in the control panel, click on the FOCUS VIEW button.





Viewer



System

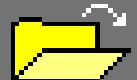


Diagnostics

VLS4.60

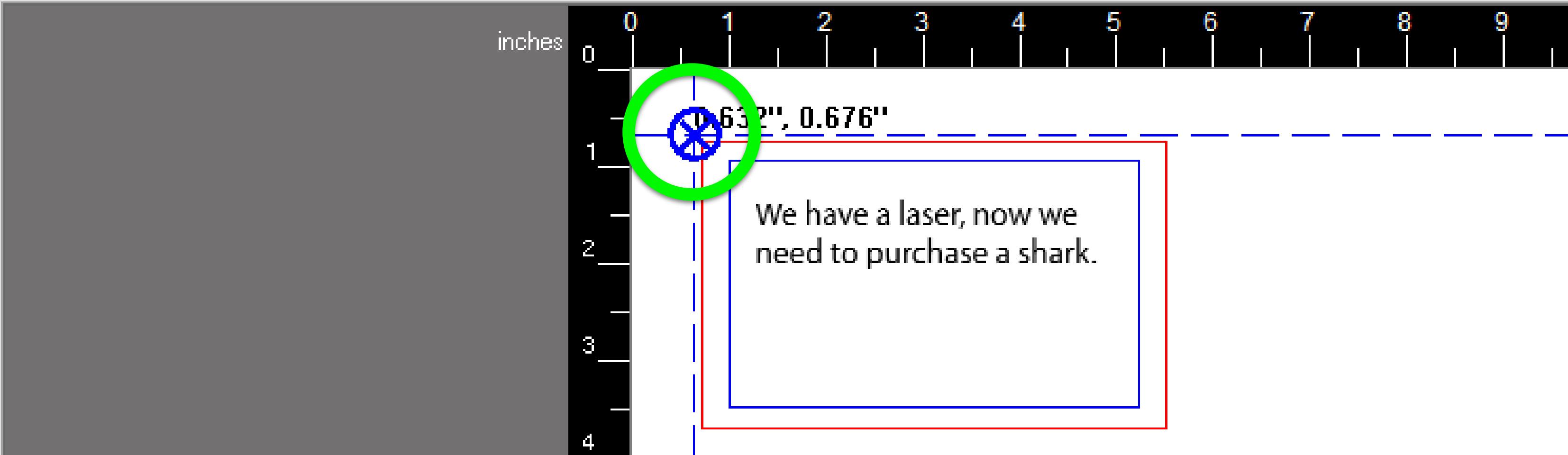
File: 1. Untitled-1

1 of 1

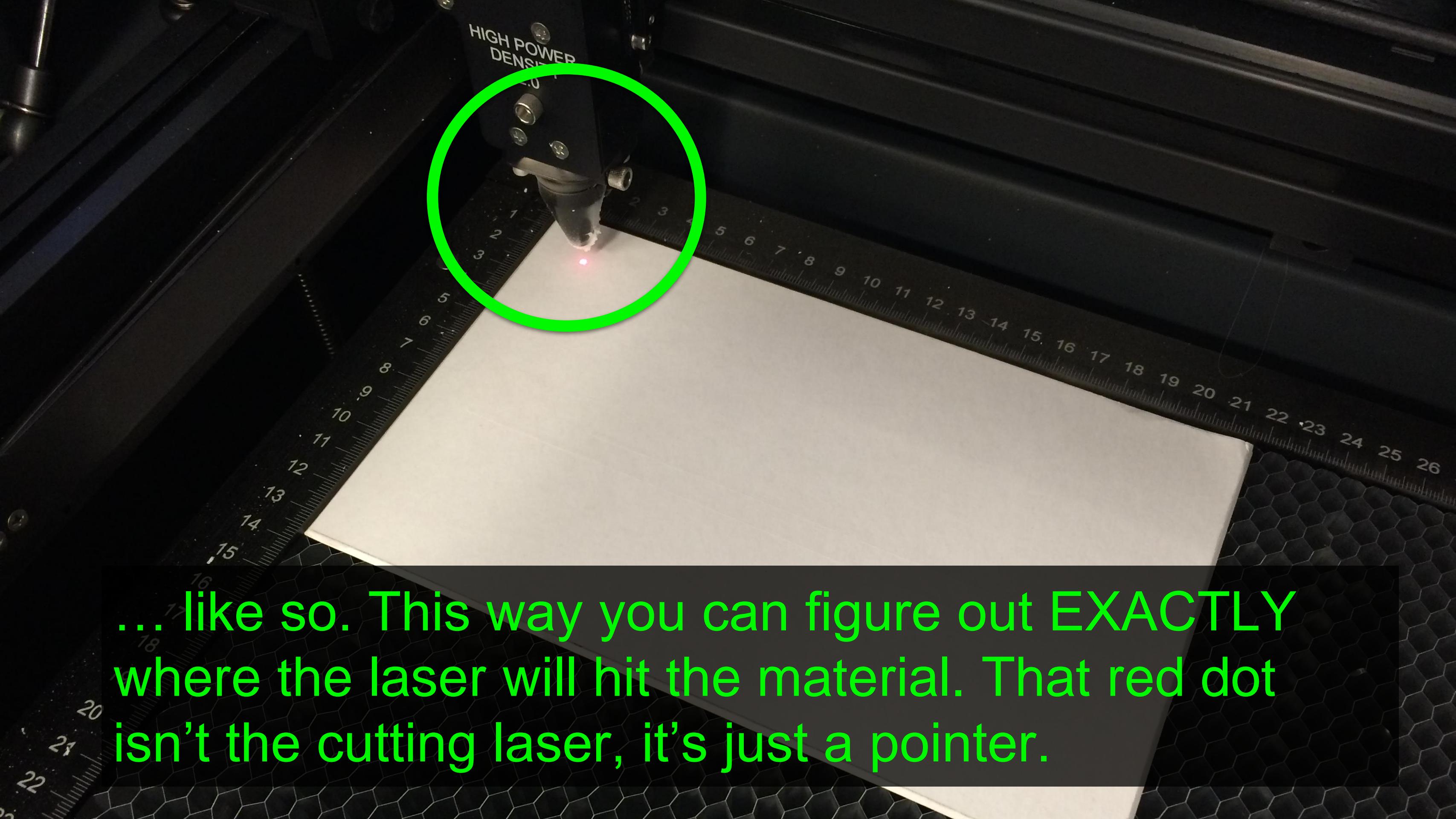


Created on:

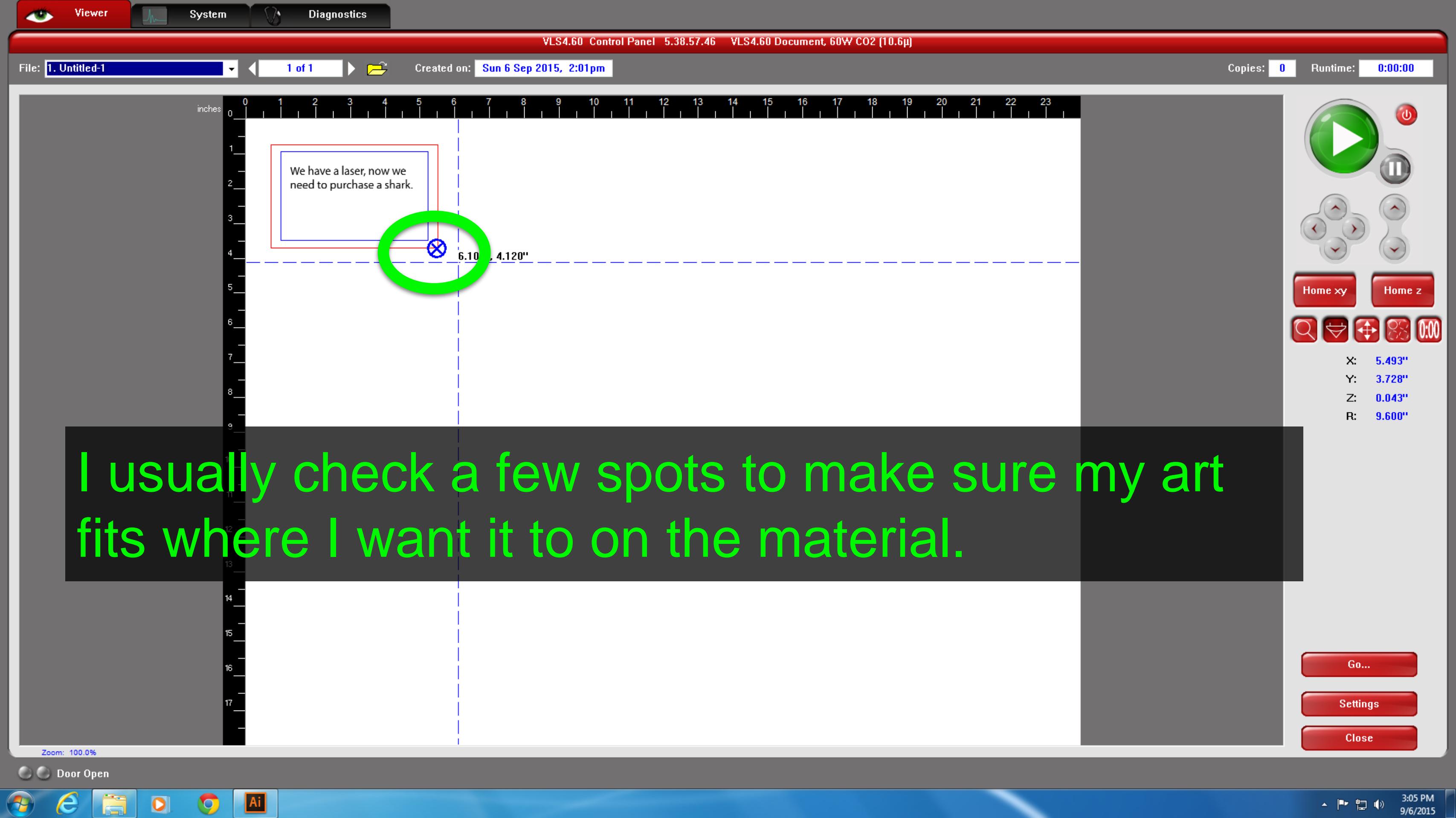
Sun 6 Sep 2015, 2:0

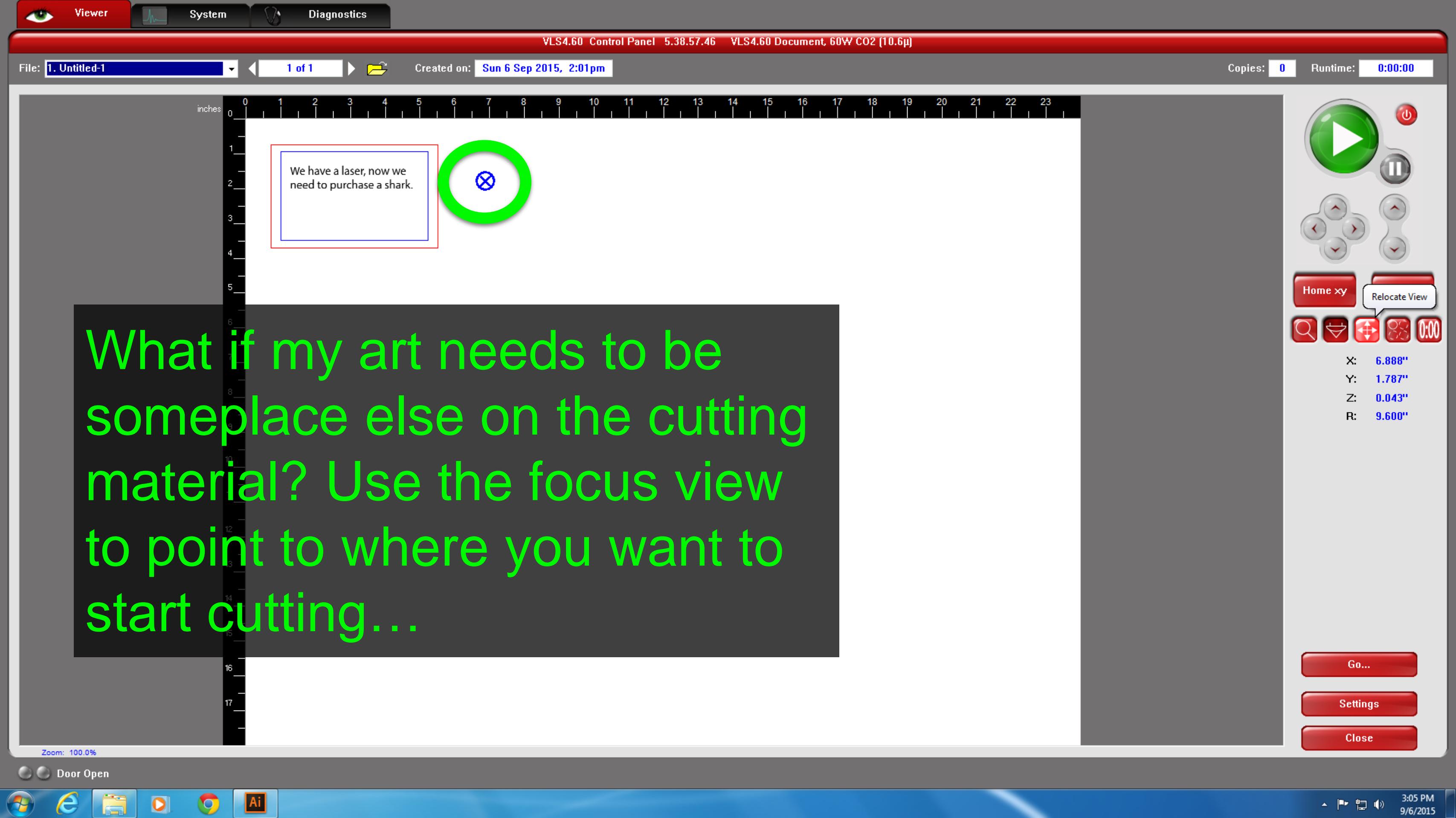


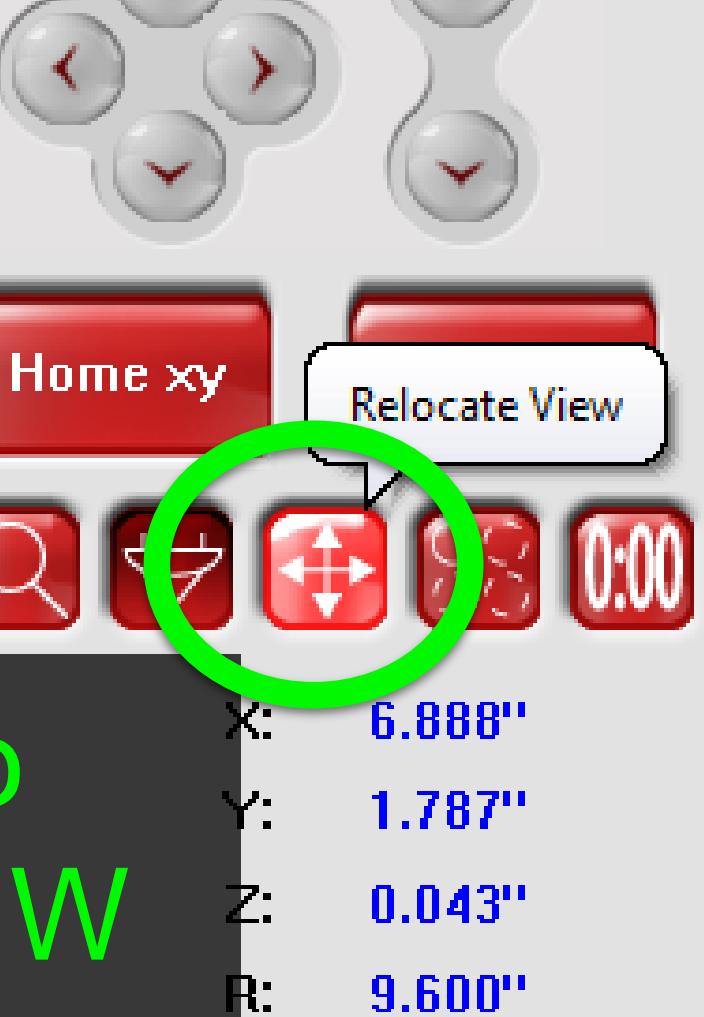
Clicking on the image area moves the lens around the cutting table...



...like so. This way you can figure out EXACTLY where the laser will hit the material. That red dot isn't the cutting laser, it's just a pointer.



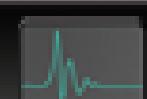




... then switch to  
**RELOCATE VIEW**



Viewer



System



Diagnostics

VLS4.60 Control Panel 5.38.5

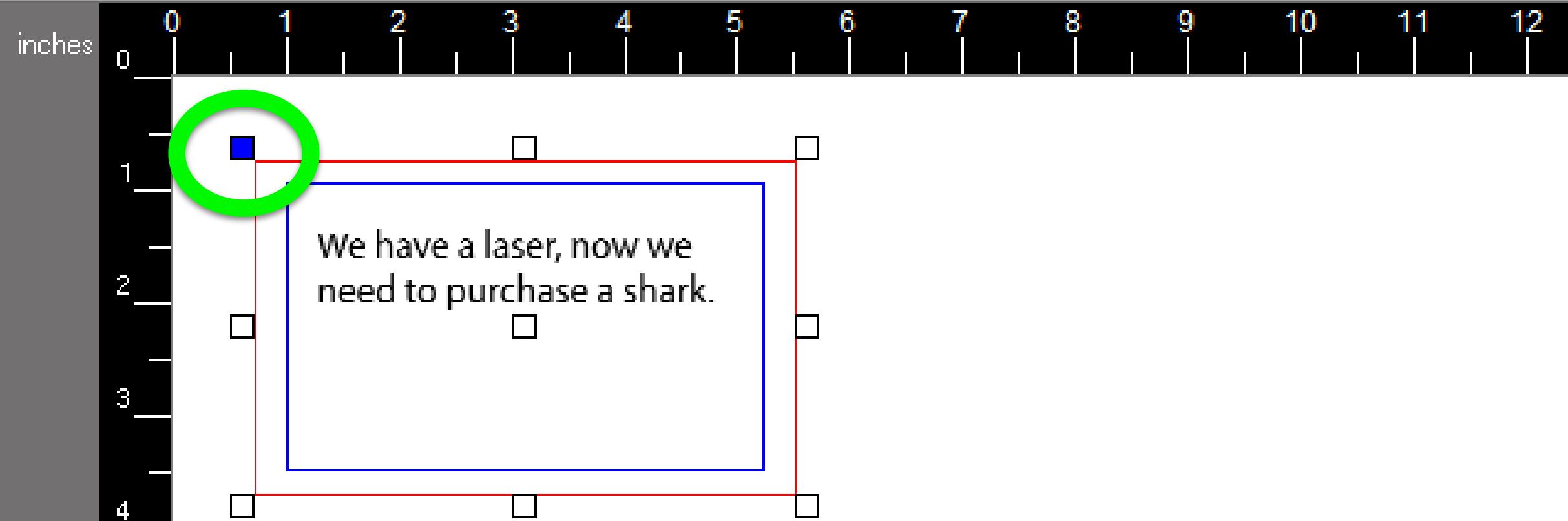
File: 1. Untitled-1

1 of 1



Created on:

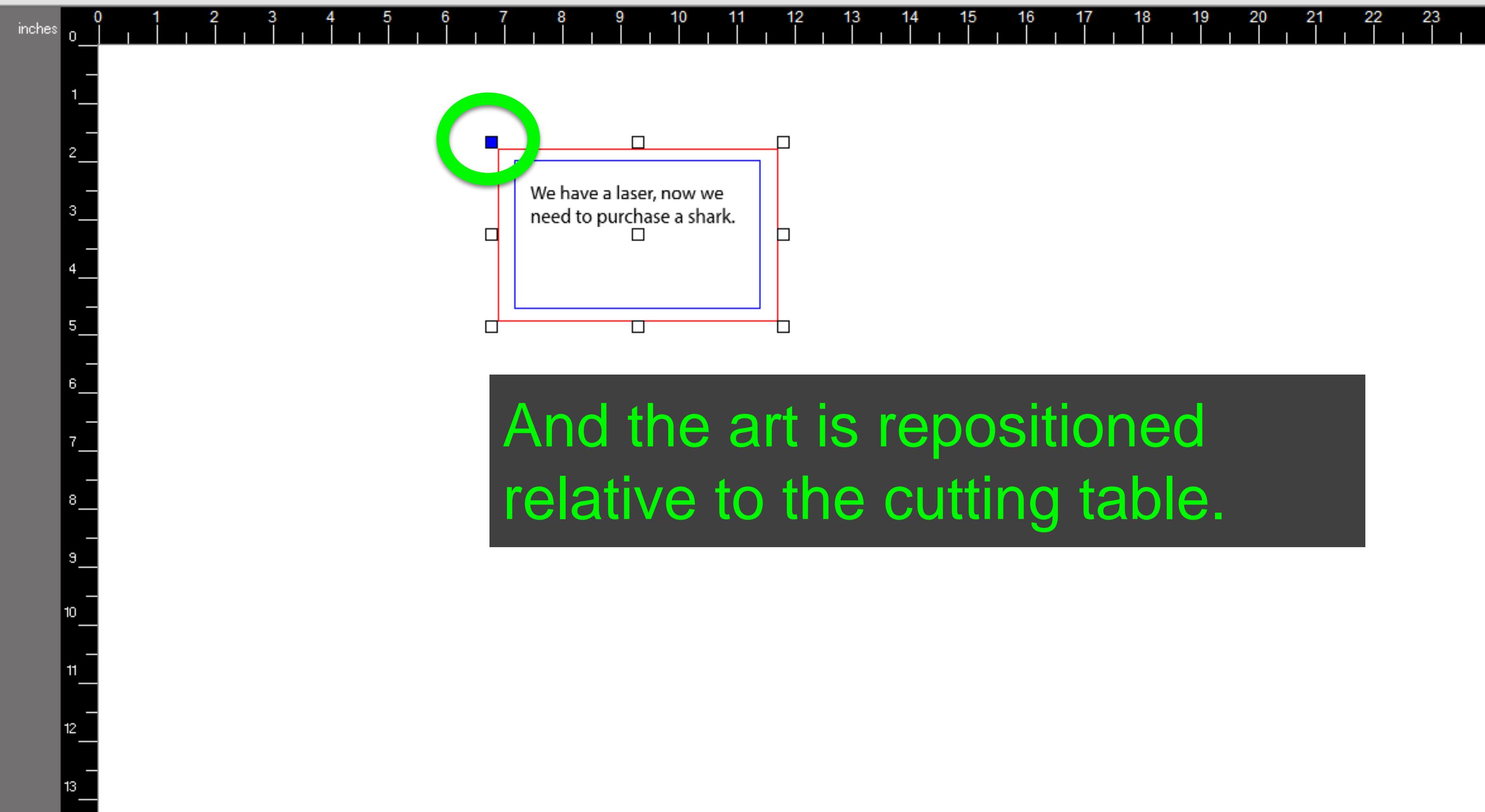
Sun 6 Sep 2015, 2:01pm



Click on a corner tab of the art to align to the current location of the lens (default is upper-left, usually fine.)

Then click on TO POINTER.





Copies: 0

Runtime: 0:00:00

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23

How long will it take to run the job? Click on that last button to switch to this view...



Copies: 0

Runtime: 0:00:00

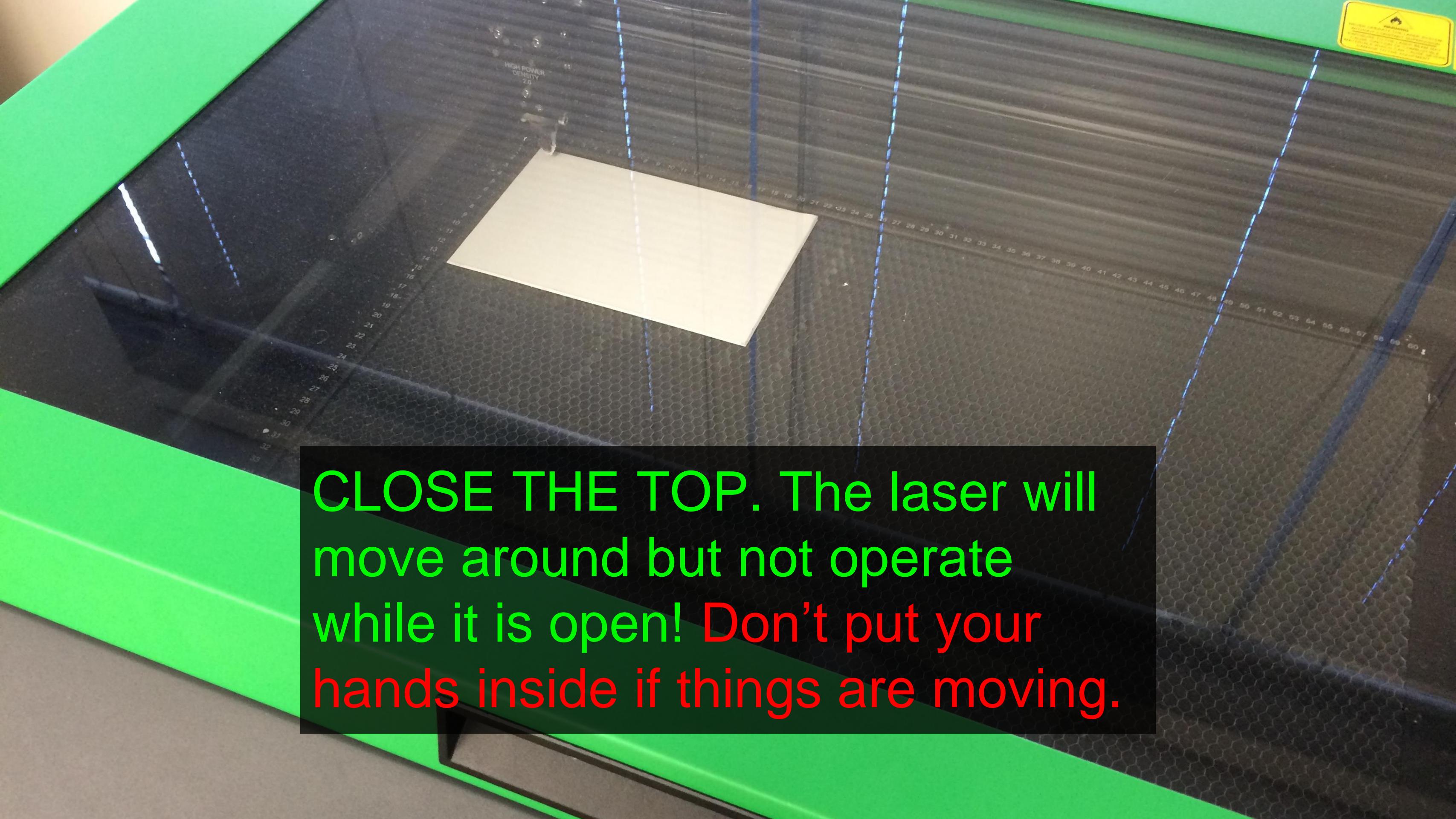
15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23

Then click START.



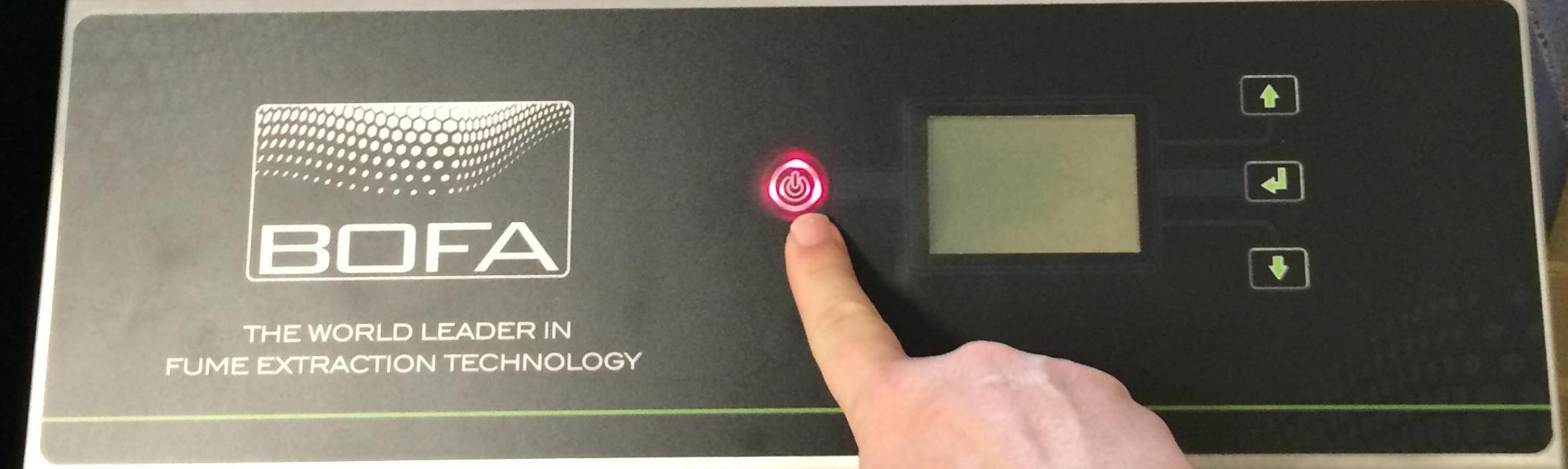
Estimated time is 1 minute  
and 20 seconds... FAST!





**CLOSE THE TOP.** The laser will move around but not operate while it is open! Don't put your hands inside if things are moving.

Power on the fume extractor next to the laser you are using.



Copies: 0

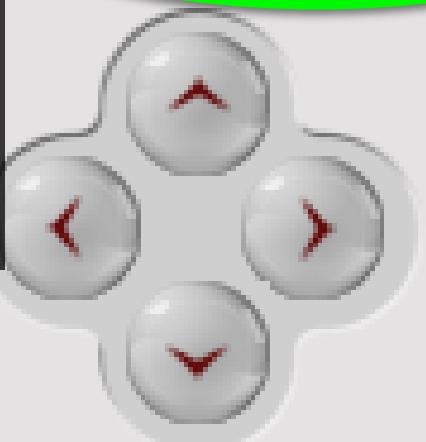
Runname:

0:00:00

20 21 22 23

Now hit the ginormous  
START BUTTON.

Start engraving this print job.



Home xy

Home z



Once you start the job, **DO NOT**  
**LEAVE THE LASER UNATTENDED!** If  
the material you are cutting catches  
fire, stop the job; if **YOU** need to put  
out the fire. Know where the fire  
extinguisher is!

If there is a small fire on the laser,  
**DON'T PANIC!** It's contained in the  
cutting chamber, so it shouldn't get out  
of control. Get the lab tech: they will  
decide if using the fire extinguisher is  
necessary. **IF** for some reason you use  
the fire extinguisher, the lab tech on duty  
should call UPD and email Devin.

TIP: if your job takes a long time,  
**make sure the computer doesn't fall asleep.** If the computer falls asleep the laser will shut down in the middle of the job and you will have to restart from the beginning. Move the mouse every few minutes.

**Starting to cook!**

We have a laser, now we  
need to purchase a shark.

A minute-and-a-half later!

After the job is done, wait 30-60 seconds before opening the top.

This gives the system time to vent any fumes and allows your material to cool.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pointing their index finger towards a white rectangular piece of paper. The paper is resting on a dark, textured surface, possibly a desk or chair. The background is slightly blurred, showing some blue and black colors.

We have a laser, now we  
need to purchase a shark.

DONE!

File: 19. Untitled-1

19 of 19



Created on: Fri 5 Feb 2016, 10:23am

Once you are finished cutting, clear the job queue to save space on the computer for other folks. To do that, click on this little open folder icon....

## Select A Print Job

- 1. penpot-3
- 2. penpot-2
- 3. penpot-2
- 4. penpot-4
- 5. penpot-5
- 6. Untitled-1
- 7. cucalorus\_plakas
- 8. cucalorus\_plakas
- 9. cucalorus\_plakas
- 10. cucalorus\_plakas
- 11. cucalorus\_plakas
- 12. Hologram
- 13. Hologram
- 14. Hologram
- 15. Hologram
- 16. Hologram
- 17. Untitled-1
- 18. moon
- 19. Untitled-1

You'll see a list of the recent jobs on the left. To clear everything out, click the 'Purge' button.

Select

Export...

Import...

Delete

Purge

Close

Filename:

Untitled-1

Created on:

Fri 5 Feb 2016, 10:23am

Runtime:

0:00:00

Fixture:

Standard Table

Material:

Cardboard

Thickness:

4mm

Permanent

## Select A Print Job

- 1. penpot-3
- 2. penpot-2
- 3. penpot-2
- 4. penpot-4
- 5. penpot-5
- 6. Untitled-1
- 7. cucalorus\_plakas
- 8. cucalorus\_plakas
- 9. cucalorus\_plakas
- 10. cucalorus\_plakas
- 11. cucalorus\_plakas
- 12. Hologram
- 13. Hologram
- 14. Hologram
- 15. Hologram
- 16. Hologram
- 17. Untitled-1
- 18. moon
- 19. Untitled-1

Permanent

DO IT!

Creation: Fri Feb 19, 2010, 10:23am

Filename:  
Untitled-1

Runtime:  
0:00:00

Fixture:  
Standard Table

Material:  
Cardboard

Thickness:  
4mm

Select

Export...

Import...

Delete

Purge

Yes

No

Purge

Close

## Select A Print Job

Select

Export...

Import...

Delete

Purge

Cool, we're done.

Filename:

Fixture:

Permanent

Created on:

Printline:

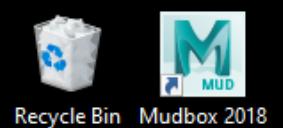
Material:

Thickness:

**Close**

When you are done:

- clear any debris from the cutting table
- purge files from the queue
- close the laser control panel
- quit out of Illustrator
- log out of Creative Cloud
- log out of the computer (which shuts off the laser) and power down the fume extractor



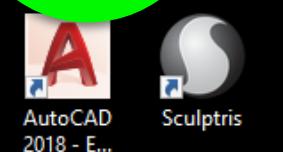
Recycle Bin Mudbox 2018



3ds Max 2019 RapidWork...  
3.5.1



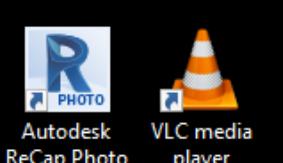
Adobe Creative...



AutoCAD  
2018 - E...  
Sculptris



Autodesk  
Netfab...  
UCP



Autodesk  
ReCap Photo  
VLC media  
player



Autodesk  
ReCap



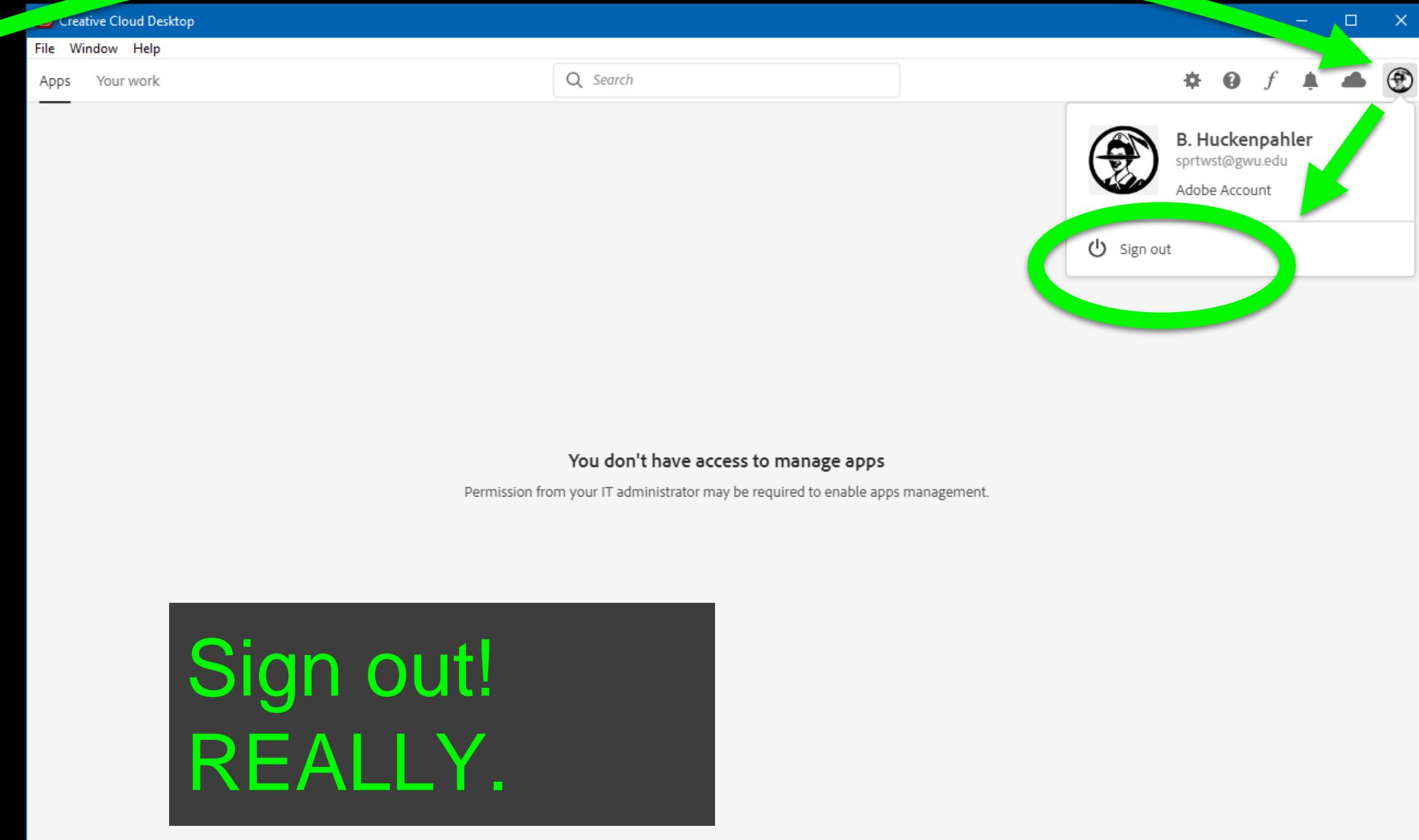
Firefox



Google  
Chrome



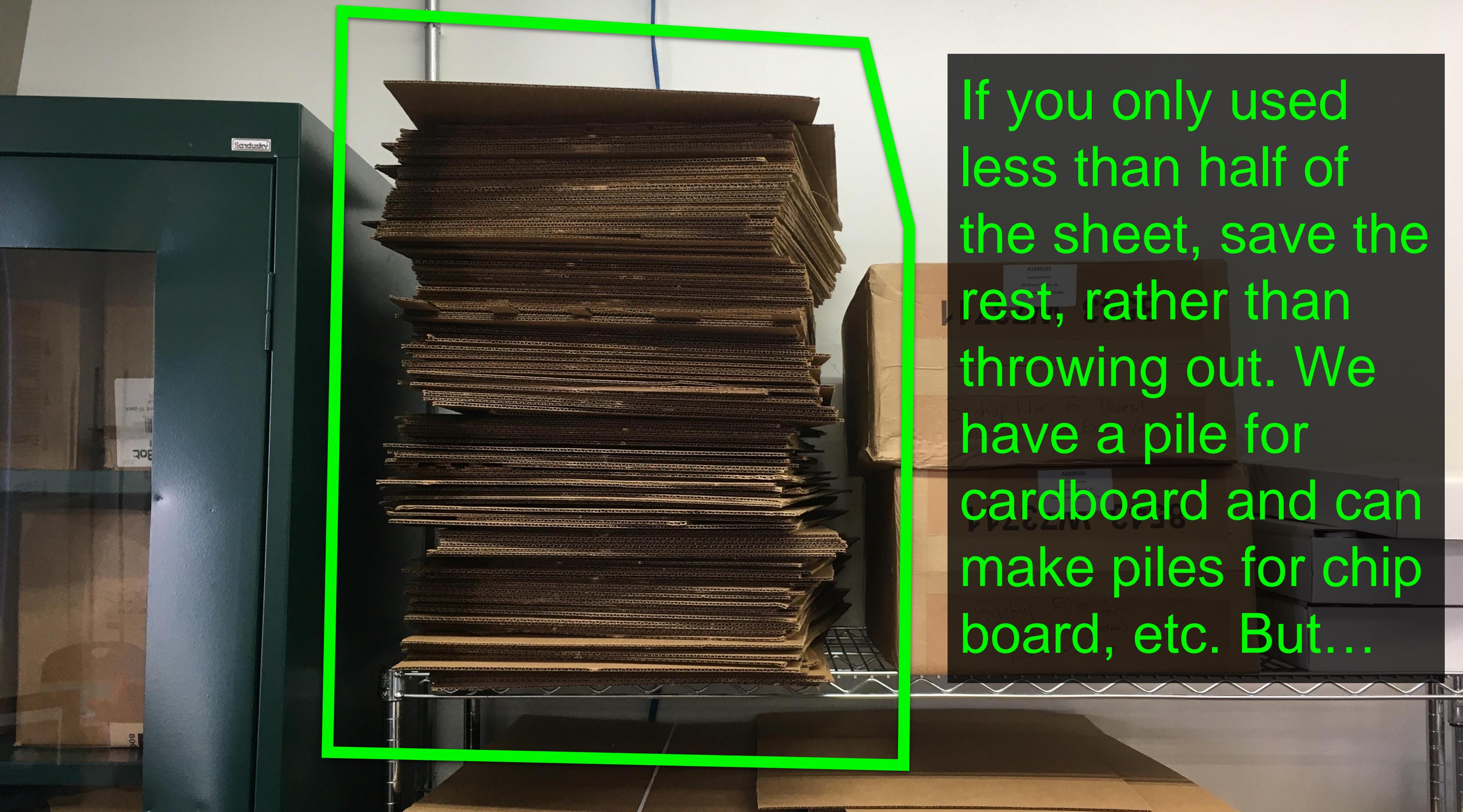
MakerBot  
Print



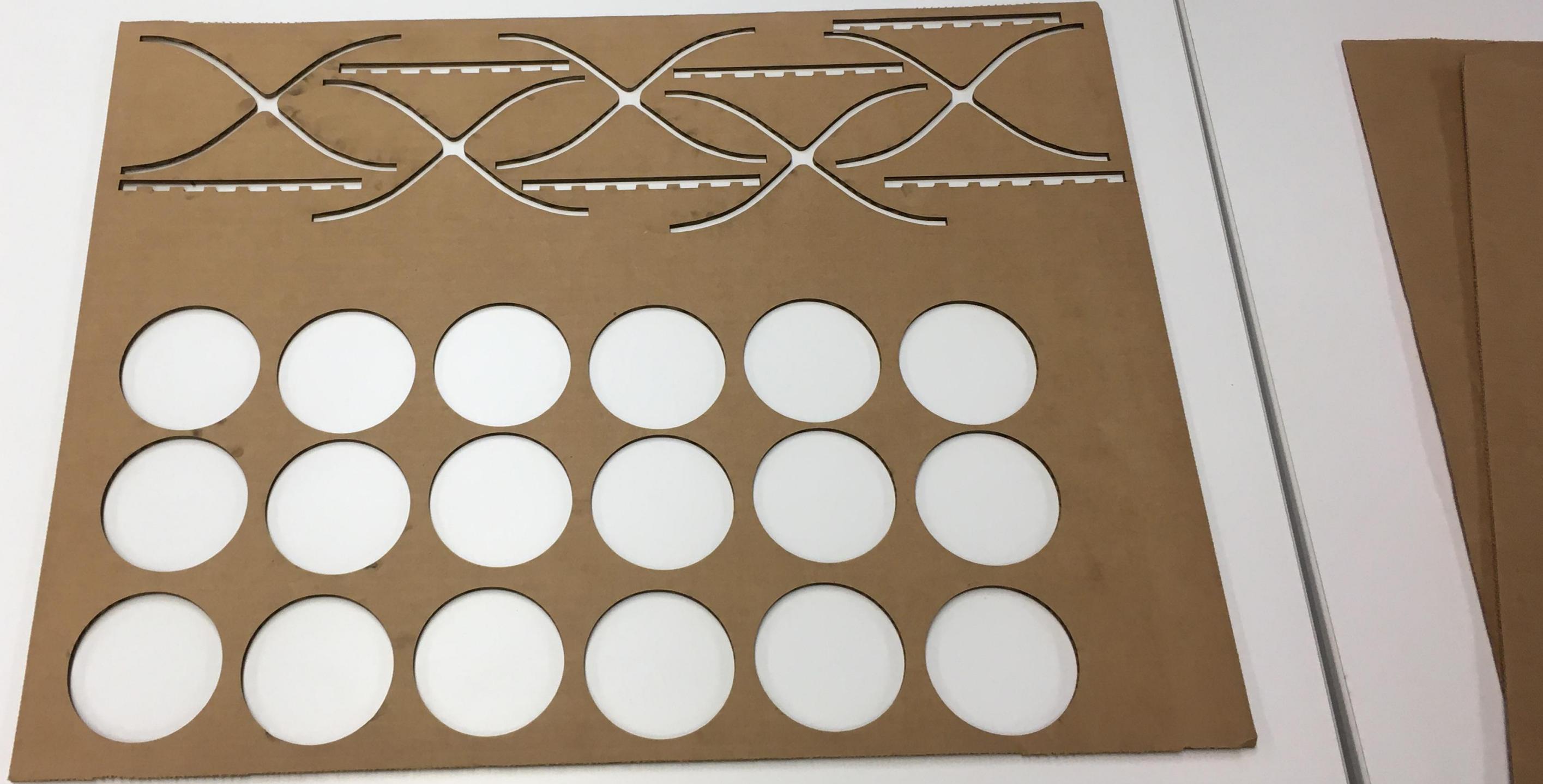
**CLEAN UP!!!!**



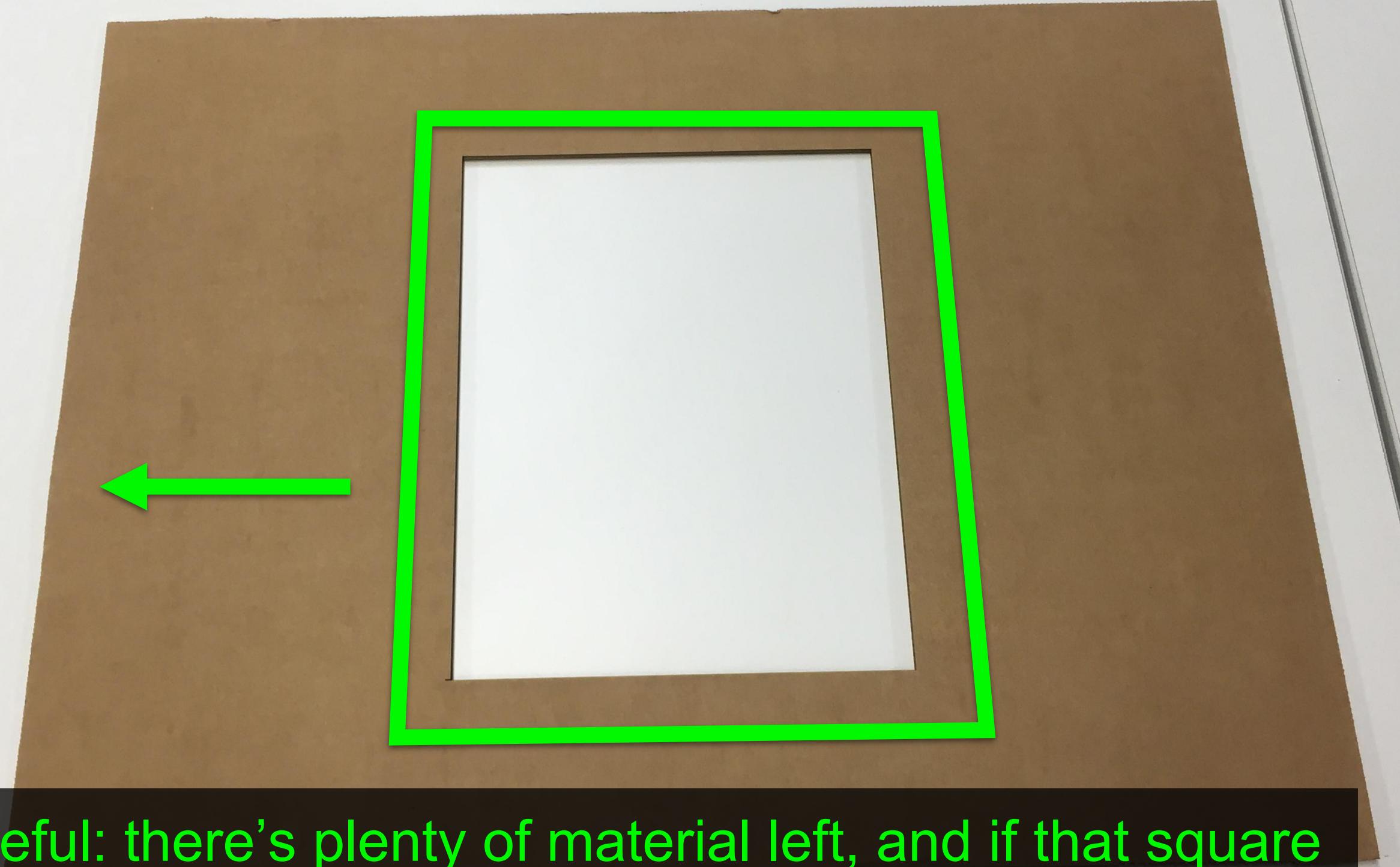
This is AWFUL. Never leave materials lying around,  
**ESPECIALLY** not on top of equipment.



If you only used less than half of the sheet, save the rest, rather than throwing out. We have a pile for cardboard and can make piles for chip board, etc. But...

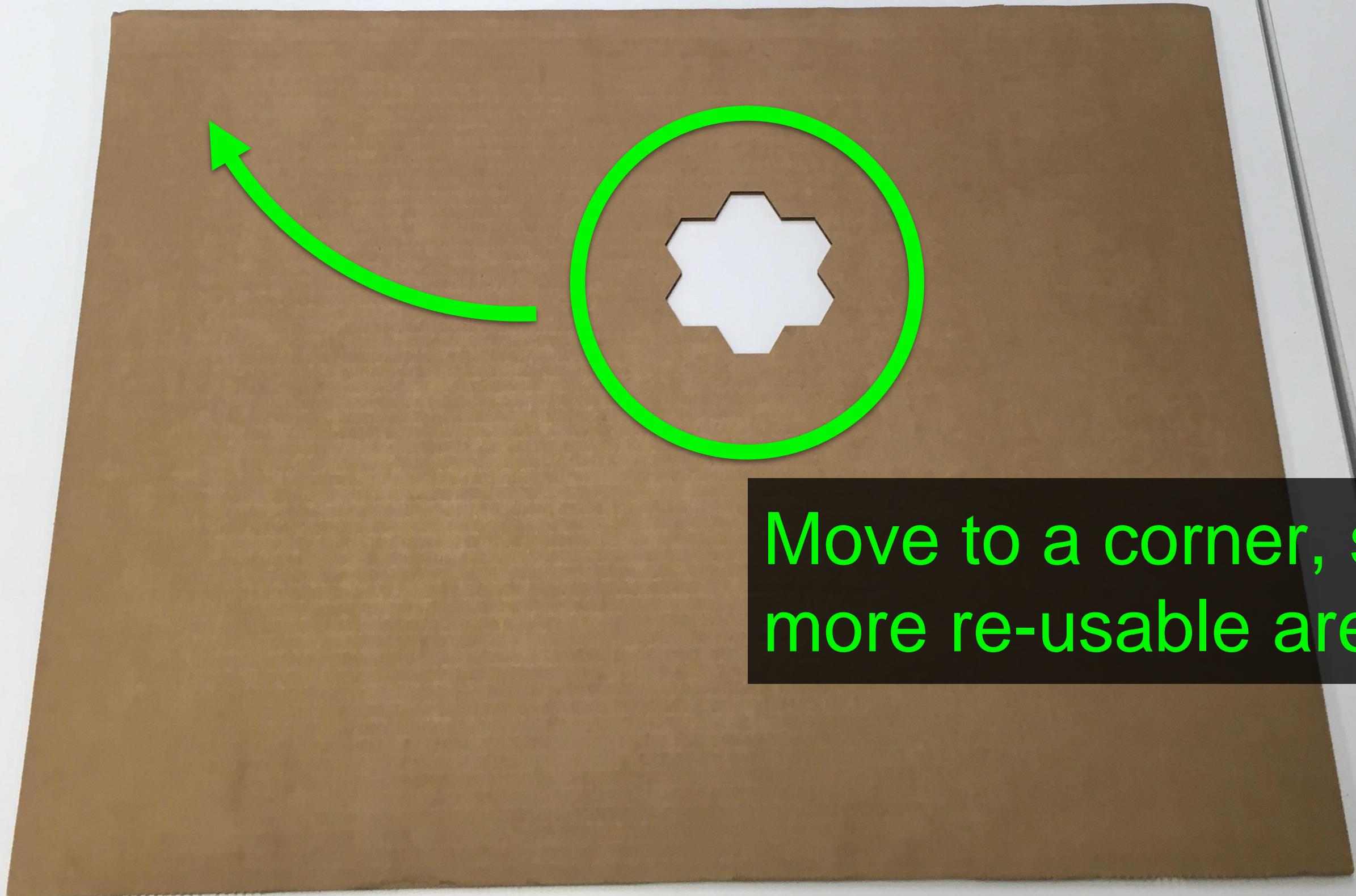


I see sheets like this in the pile  
ALL THE TIME. Really? Trash.



This is wasteful: there's plenty of material left, and if that square had been cut on one end, rather than the center, there would be a larger re-usable space.

Good grief.



Move to a corner, so  
more re-usable area.