

Welcome to the first edition of Tree Work News. This replaces Arb News and will keep you up to date with health and safety news for your industry.

Vibration - the invisible risk!

Hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) is caused by vibration transmitted from work machinery into workers' hands and arms. In tree work the main risks will come from the use of chainsaws but can also arise from the use of any handheld machinery that vibrates.

Hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) describes a range of different diseases such as carpal tunnel syndrome and vibration white finger. Because it is caused by using handheld tools that vibrate it is most commonly associated with the use of chainsaws and other powered handheld tools. This means that those involved in tree work or arboriculture are at particular risk.

Understanding and identifying the early signs and symptoms of HAVs are important steps in preventing the disease. This allows action to be taken as early as possible to prevent the disease from progressing. For some people, symptoms may appear after only a few months of exposure, but for others they may take a few years.

Early stage symptoms of HAVS:

- loss of strength in the hands;
- noticing that the fingers go white when using tools and then become red and painful on recovery - particularly in the cold and wet;
- pain is usually most severe at the fingertips. Symptoms get worse with continued exposure to vibration and may become permanent.

As the disease progresses workers will be in increasing pain and distress. They will lose the ability to do fine work or everyday tasks like fastening buttons. In the worst cases gangrene can set into the fingertips.

How can I control/reduce vibration exposure and prevent HAVS?

- Eliminating or reducing vibration exposure at source should be the first step (ie can the job be done in a different way) or by adopting a purchasing policy where suitable (reduced-vibration) equipment is selected.
- Train operators how to reduce vibration exposure.
- Make sure work equipment is maintained in good condition.
- Where exposure limit values are exceeded it will be necessary to put time limits on the use of certain machinery and rotate jobs between employees to reduce exposure. An exposure points system can help you make these decisions.
- Where symptoms of HAVS are likely or have been reported then health surveillance is essential.



Recent HSE publications

Steep slope working in forestry AFAG leaflet 705
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/afag705.pdf

Five steps to risk assessment Leaflet INDG163(rev3)
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf

Key messages on preventing HAVS

- HAVS is preventable, but once the damage is done it is permanent.
- HAVS is serious and disabling, and nearly two million people are at risk.
- Damage from HAVS can include the inability to do fine work and cold can trigger painful finger blanching attacks.
- The costs to employees and to employers of inaction could be high.
- There are simple and cost-effective ways to eliminate risk of HAVS.
- The Control of Vibration at Work Regulations focus on the elimination or control of vibration exposure.
- The long-term aim is to prevent new cases of HAVS occurring and enable workers to remain at work without disability.
- The most efficient and effective way of controlling exposure to hand-arm vibration is to look for new or alternative work methods which eliminate or reduce exposure to vibration.
- Health surveillance is vital to detect and respond to early signs of damage.
- HSE guidance is available to help you control these risks and therefore visit the website below for free information or contact infoline on 0845 345 0055 for assistance.

Standards update

HSE and the Forestry Commission play an active role in the development of both UK and International Standards for machinery used in tree work. Why is this important? Well, machinery standards are of huge benefit to manufacturers, suppliers and end users of work equipment. The standards provide guidance and information on how machinery should be designed to make sure the equipment is safe to use and also provide instructions on how manufacturers should measure emissions such as noise and vibration.

People from a range of backgrounds (including machinery manufacturers, end users, professional institutions, consumer interest organisations and government departments) all work together to develop the standard. This means that as a buyer, you can be confident that the equipment has been made to a high standard. It allows you to compare different products before buying, for example when comparing vibration emissions to buy the machine with the lowest vibration. You can also use the measured values as part of your noise and vibration risk assessments (see <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg175.pdf> for more information). Selecting the right machinery is the cornerstone of good health and safety in tree work.

Recent work has focussed on two International Standards committees (ISO).

ISO TC/23/SC17 deals with manually portable forestry machinery such as chainsaws, brush cutters, and strimmers.

The second ISO Committee is ISO/TC23/SC15 Machinery for forestry (SC15) deals with self propelled machinery such as harvesters and excavators. The main area of discussion has involved a new ISO standard for the provision of Roll Over Protection (ROPS) on 360-degree rotating platform excavators. This standard has been developed by a different ISO Committee and was originally designed to apply to excavators used only in the construction industry. However, as these machines are also used in forestry SC15 have become involved. Those companies using excavators in forestry in line with AFAG 704 *Excavators in forestry* should continue to do so. E-mail jason.liggins@hse.gsi.gov.uk for further information.

Forestry safety and health awareness days (SHADs)

This year's free Forestry SHADs are being held at:

Inverness - Thursday 27 September
Nottingham - Tuesday 23 October
Forest of Dean - Thursday 25 October

Following suggestions from attendees at previous SHADs, both forestry contractors and managers will be invited to the same events. The content of the SHADs is being developed and the event will reflect the nature of the forestry industry locally as well as dealing with the highest risk areas of forestry work. Health issues such as noise and vibration will be looked at for the first time at these events.

These events are recommended for farmers who are considering diversifying into forestry, for example for bio-fuel production. E-mail jason.liggins@hse.gsi.gov.uk for further information.

Engaging arboricultural contractors safety and health awareness days (SHADs)

HSE hopes to run a SHAD for arboriculture clients in the London area early next year. These awareness days highlight the crucial role that clients have in driving up health and safety standards in arboriculture. They provide an update on new legislation, guidance and technical issues and advice to help ensure clients employ competent contractors. They are aimed at a wide variety of organisations and previous attendees have included representatives from local authorities (LAs), housing associations, construction companies, NHS trusts, Network Rail, landscapers, the Highways Agency, utility companies, universities and colleges, charitable organisations, the Forestry Commission and land agents. Further information is available from frances.hirst@hse.gsi.gov.uk.

Recent tree-work prosecution

An independent school was prosecuted following three cases of serious allergic dermatitis due to exposure to the sap of a Japanese Lacquer tree (*Toxicodendrum Vernicifluum*) in the school grounds. Those affected were employees of the tree surgery company who were brought in to section fell the tree which was diseased. The school was prosecuted under regulation 12 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work regulations for failing to pass on information regarding the tree's identity to the people employed to work on the tree. The school pleaded guilty and was fined £250 plus £1653.50 costs.

Further information on working with this hazardous tree is contained in an Alert Notice produced by Landscape Planning Group which was published in Arb News in May 2006 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/pdf/arboc06.pdf>

Recent enforcement notices

Prohibition Notices have been issued to cover:

- unsafe access into a tree (no rope and harness available);
- unsafe wood chipper - the machine could be operated from stop to feed without a rest/second action; and
- unsafe chainsaw work – including no PPE on chainsaw user, no signage to protect against risks to/from traffic.

Improvement Notices have been issued to cover:

- suitable seat restraints in mobile work equipment (two Ford county tractors) used in a forestry harvesting operation;
- segregation of pedestrians and vehicles on site; and
- failure to control risk from hand-arm vibration.

HSE Campaigns

Don't chance it – CHANGE IT!

A major HSE campaign is launched this month (October 2007) to raise awareness and target accidents caused by falls from vehicles. While it is primarily aimed at the haulage business, there are significant numbers of accidents in other industries that could be prevented if simple control measures were adopted.

There are three key areas that cause most incidents:

- Carrying passengers in unsafe positions – only carry someone else if a proper passenger seat is fitted and never on drawbars or loaded trailers.
- Falls from vehicles during loading/unloading or maintenance – plan work to avoid climbing onto trailers if possible but if it is necessary make sure you keep the work area clear of trip hazards and take extra care. If you need to work at height, for example to clean a combine or change cab filters, use suitable access equipment.
- Slips/trips mounting tractors or mobile machines – always use the steps and handholds provided and face inwards so that you can maintain a good grip. Keep cab steps well maintained and never jump down from a tractor cab or machine – you don't have to fall far to fall hard!

Campaign materials such as posters and pocket cards are available by visiting www.hse.gov.uk/fallsfromvehicles/workers.htm. If you are an employer or a manager these can help you to raise awareness and prevent these accidents which could cost your business money.

European Week for Safety and Health at Work 2007

Lighten the Load – 22 – 26 October 2007

This year's European Week campaign 'Lighten the Load' is dedicated to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). The aim of the campaign is to support employers, workers, safety representatives and other stakeholders in improving MSD prevention. Helpful information on MSDs and European-wide initiatives are contained on the following web site <http://www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/euroweek/>. European Week will run from 22 – 26 October 2007.

MSDs are the most common form of ill-health disorders at work, both in the UK and across Europe. Work-related MSDs affect 1.0 million people in Great Britain alone each year. Problems include back pain, work-related neck and upper limb disorders (ULDs), including repetitive strain injuries, and lower limb disorders. Raising awareness, prevention and management are all key factors in reducing MSDs.

Meet HSE staff

Many thanks to those of you who came and discussed your health safety concerns with HSE representatives at the following events:

June - Arboricultural Association Trade Fair, Cirencester

September - IOG Saltex, Windsor Race Course

- Arboricultural Association Annual Conference, Warwick University

Further information

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: www.hsebooks.co.uk (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk.)

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

Your views

If you have any issues or concerns you would like to share with AFAG, HSE and the industry please let us know.

Send your views to Frances Hirst at the address below.

To receive this newsletter by e-mail in future please send your e-mail address to:

frances.hirst@hse.gsi.gov.uk

Tree Work News is produced by HSE's Agriculture and Food Sector based at Belgrave House, Greyfriars, Northampton NN1 2BS. Tel: 01604 738314