

Managing back pain in drivers

How the new Vibration Regulations affect you

When will the new Vibration Regulations come into force and what will they cover?

They will be introduced by 6 July 2005. They will cover the control of risks from hand-arm vibration (HAV) and whole body vibration (WBV).

When is exposure to WBV likely to lead to back pain?

WBV is not usually the main cause of back pain in drivers; many other factors may contribute, eg lifting, poor/constrained posture, ergonomics. Most exposure to WBV is unlikely to cause back pain except when there is unusually high vibration or shock or the vibration is uncomfortable for a large part of the working day. However, exposure to WBV can cause pain in people with existing back problems. The vibration from normal road driving is unlikely to pose a risk of back pain.

What action can you take to avoid back pain when driving or operating mobile machinery?

- Make sure the machine or vehicle is suitable for the job, is well maintained and has no defective dampers, springs or suspension components, including the suspension seat where fitted. Operate any attachments as smoothly as possible, for example excavator buckets.
- Make sure you can operate the controls and can see clearly without stretching, twisting or leaning and that you are seated comfortably. Adjust suspension seats etc correctly according to the manufacturer's instructions. Avoid bad postures, twisting or sitting in a static position for a long time. Take regular breaks.
- Choose routes avoiding rough surfaces. If this is not possible, then drive more slowly to avoid bumping and jolting.
- Don't jump off the vehicle, or make other awkward movements that jar your back. Avoid lifting and carrying awkward or heavy loads and/or follow HSE guidance on lifting and carrying.

How to comply with the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005

Where drivers or operators work off-road, spend long hours driving, experience shocks or jolts, and/or there is a history of back pain then it is likely that there may be a risk from exposure to WBV. You should assess the vibration along with other risk factors (manual handling, posture etc) and, where there is likely to be a risk of back pain, take simple actions to reduce the risk. Health surveillance is not appropriate for WBV, but HSE recommends that you set up a simple system to monitor for back pain.

Do I need to measure vibration?

No. In most cases there is no need to measure WBV, but duty holders will need to:

- check that the machines are suitable for the task;
- check that employees are trained in correct use of control measures;
- check that seats are correctly adjusted;
- check the machines are used safely;
- ensure monitoring is carried out on the correct use of the controls that have been implemented; and
- ensure systems to monitor for symptoms of ill-health are set up.

What are the EAV and ELV?

The exposure action value (EAV) is $0.5 \text{ m/s}^2 \text{ A(8)}$ and this is the level at which employers are required to assess the risk from exposure to WBV and to take action.

The exposure limit value (ELV) is $1.15 \text{ m/s}^2 \text{ A(8)}$ and this is the maximum amount of vibration an employee may be exposed to on any single day.

Most off-road operations may exceed the EAV. Depending on the task, vehicle speed, ground conditions, driver skill and duration of operation, high exposures to WBV (which may exceed the ELV) could be found in off-road machinery such as:

- construction, mining and quarrying machines and vehicles;
- earth-moving machines such as scrapers, bulldozers and building site dumpers;
- tractors and other agricultural and forestry machinery (especially when used in transportation, turning hay, primary cultivation and mowing).

In all cases, taking the sensible precautions described above will reduce the risk.

What is the transitional period?

The Regulations allow a transitional period for the limit value until July 2010 (or until 2014 for the agricultural and forestry sectors). This only applies to machines or vehicles first supplied to operatives before July 2007. The exposure limit value may be exceeded during the transitional periods if you have complied with all the other requirements of the Regulations and taken all reasonably practicable actions to reduce risk.

Further information

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055.

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