COSHH essentials for woodworkers

**Introduction**
HSE have produced these advice sheets to help employers assess and control risks from hazardous substances in the workplace. For some common tasks the sheets take into account the health hazards (and exposure potential) of substances used or produced to identify an approach appropriate to control the risks.

The WD series of control guidance sheets describe good practice for controlling exposure to wood dust in the woodworking industry. The sheets cover the key points you need to follow to reduce exposure to an adequate level. Follow all the points, or use equally effective measures to comply with workplace exposure limits (WELs).

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<th>Equipment</th>
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**What the sheets cover**
Reducing exposure to an adequate level always involves a mixture of equipment and ways of working. This means employers should:

- choose the most effective and reliable control measures;
- ensure they are used properly by instructing, training and supervising workers;
- ensure they keep on working by maintaining the control measures;
- check and review all elements of control measures regularly for their continued effectiveness.

Each sheet gives advice on how to achieve this for a particular task.
Hazards
Wood dust is made up of tiny particles of wood produced during processing. Wood dust can also contain bacteria, fungal and moss spores. The amount and type of wood dust generated will depend on the wood being cut and the machine you are using, eg:

- whether the timber is green or seasoned which will affect the moisture content;
- whether it is a hardwood, softwood or composite board; and
- how aggressive the machining process is, eg blade profile.

The following activities are likely to produce high dust exposures, some over long periods:

- machining operations, particularly sawing, routing and turning;
- sanding by machine and by hand;
- hand assembly of machined or sanded components;
- processing composite boards, eg medium-density fibreboard (MDF);
- bagging dust from dust extraction systems;

When cleaning up, compressed airlines and dry sweeping should be avoided as these will create high levels of dust in clouds that are redistributed in the workplace.

How to use the sheets

- Consider the processes/tasks and hazardous substances in your workplace.
- Look for opportunities to substitute with less hazardous materials.
- Examine the advice sheets for each of the tasks.
- Examine the essential information sheets listed on each advice sheet.
- Compare operations in your workplace with recommendations in the advice sheets for all of the relevant tasks.
- Record your findings (this forms part of your risk assessment).
- Record any actions you need to take covering: issues identified, planned actions, target completion date, person responsible, status of any issues, and a review of effectiveness.
- Keep a record of your actions to prevent exposure of workers to hazardous materials.

You may have to change old working practices or spend money on new controls. Decide how best to make any changes required ‘across the board’. If you are in doubt, seek expert help, don’t give up! Ask your trade association, trade union or contact a consultant (see Further information).

Essential information
You can find the full COSHH essentials series at www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/essentials/index.htm

Health surveillance, monitoring and sampling sheets are available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/gseries.htm
Further information
Local exhaust ventilation (LEV) workplace fume and dust extraction web page: www.hse.gov.uk/lev

Respiratory protective equipment (RPE) web page:
www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment

Respiratory protective equipment at work: A practical guide HSG53

Controlling airborne contaminants at work: A guide to local exhaust ventilation (LEV) HSG258 HSE Books 2011 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg258.htm

Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register www.oshcr.org/

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