

Supervising for safety in woodworking

Are you as good as you think you are?



This is a web-friendly version of leaflet INDG440, published 03/10

Introduction

As a supervisor, you have an important role in making your workshop safe – like it or not, you are management's 'eyes and ears' on the shop floor.

However, accident investigations have shown that supervisors are often unaware of their responsibilities and do not see themselves as part of the management team.

Read this document, answer the questions honestly then discuss with your boss what you need to do.

What supervisors said . . .

'No-one told me I was responsible for health and safety'

'I wouldn't insult his intelligence by asking why the guards were not properly adjusted'

'I just make sure we produce a good quality cupboard'

'Does the company have a health and safety policy? I haven't seen one'

'He said he was a skilled machinist – I leave guarding and all that to him'

Do any of these comments sound familiar? If so, then this leaflet will help you.

Your manager must make sure you know what your responsibilities are and that you are able to carry them out.

The law

The law says:

- employers have to make sure supervisors receive adequate health and safety training. This should include training in how to use the work equipment under their control, the risks involved and the precautions to take;
- supervisors must co-operate with their employer and provide the necessary supervision required for health and safety. Also, as an employee, they are required to take reasonable care for their own health and safety.



As a supervisor, you have a difficult job – production and quality have to be maintained, but not at the expense of safety. You will need to make some difficult decisions – but that is a key part of a supervisor’s job.

As a supervisor you are **the** vital link in the chain to make sure health and safety is effectively managed in the workshop.

Remember:

- A good supervisor should always lead by example. This should help to develop a safety conscious workforce.
- You are paid to supervise – and this includes supervising for safety. Don’t be afraid to stop something you think is wrong. If in doubt, ask, as it’s always better to be safe than sorry!

Who is responsible for health and safety?

Where do you **think** each person has particular responsibilities – you may tick more than one box?

Whose primary responsibility is it to ensure that:	Operator	Supervisor	Manager
People are properly supervised for safety at all times?			
People work and behave safely at all times?			
People are properly trained?			
People are obeying company health and safety rules?			
Everyone is aware of the hazards in the workplace?			
Machinery is properly guarded when used?			
Machines and equipment are inspected to ensure they are safe to use?			
People are using the correct safety appliances properly, eg jigs and pushsticks?			
People are not unnecessarily exposed to hazardous substances?			
People are using the correct personal protective equipment?			
The working area is kept clean, clear and tidy?			
Everyone knows what to do in an emergency?			
Action is taken following accidents and near misses?			

How did you do? See next page to find out . . .

Whose primary responsibility is it to ensure that:	Operator	Supervisor	Manager
People are properly supervised for safety at all times?		✓	✓
People work and behave safely at all times?	✓	✓	✓
People are properly trained?		✓	✓
People are obeying company health and safety rules?	✓	✓	✓
Everyone is aware of the hazards in the workplace?		✓	✓
Machinery is properly guarded when used?	✓	✓	✓
Machines and equipment are inspected to ensure they are safe to use?		✓	✓
People are using the correct safety appliances properly, eg jigs and pushsticks?		✓	✓
People are not unnecessarily exposed to hazardous substances?		✓	✓
People are using the correct personal protective equipment?		✓	✓
The working area is kept clean, clear and tidy?	✓	✓	✓
Everyone knows what to do in an emergency?	✓	✓	✓
Action is taken following accidents and near misses?	✓	✓	✓

Surprised?

So were many other supervisors we spoke to . . .

Read on to recognise the most common and important examples where you have key responsibilities in the chain of control and can make a vital contribution.



A safe worker

Is the right person using the right equipment?

- Are all of your machinists trained and authorised?
- Are all of your other workers properly instructed?
- How do you decide how much direct supervision someone needs to ensure safety?
- How do you know the person you have chosen to do a job is competent, reliable and experienced to do it safely? If not, are you creating an accident waiting to happen?

A safe workplace

Is your workshop safe? What goes on when your back is turned?



- Do you stop your workers messing about?
- Do you have a system to make sure the workplace is kept clean and tidy and the gangways and working places are kept clear? Does it work? Where should workers eat and drink and where is it not allowed?
- How do you make sure your workers wear suitable (safe) work clothes and footwear? What happens if they don't?
- What do you do to tell your workers about the hazards in your workshop?
- What happens if they don't follow your instructions? What 'back-up' will you get if you need it?

Fire safety

How do you stop fires starting and prevent them spreading?



- Do you have flammable liquids in your workshop? If so, how much is allowed to be stored there? Are they stored safely?
- What system do you have to prevent build-up of sawdust, wood waste and off-cuts in your workplace? Does it work?
- Where are the fire extinguishers and are people trained to know how to use them?
- Can you and your workers get to all the exits and then to a safe place without obstruction?
- What would you do if you saw evidence of people smoking in the building?
- What do you do to ensure lids are put back onto cans of flammable liquids when they are not being used?
- Do you and your workers know what to do if there is a fire? When was the last fire drill?

A safe machine

Do you know what machine or equipment is best and safest to use for a job?



- Are you sure the way a job is done is safe and correct? How do you make sure workers always do it this way?
- Who sets up the machines? Do you know the correct safety procedures and are you certain they are being followed?
- Do you inspect the machines and guards to make sure they are properly maintained? Are you competent to do this?

- How often do you have to tell your machinists to properly adjust the guards? Do you have to tell them more than once in a day or shift? If so, why?
- Would you challenge an experienced wood machinist for not using cutter guards or safety devices?
- Are you familiar with the safety devices provided in your workshop and do you make sure they are always used when required?
- Do you stop a machine if it is in use without cutter guards? What about trial cutting?
- Do your workers report defects in the machine or safety devices to you and what do you then do about it? Is there a system to make sure the necessary action has been taken?

Safe transport and handling

Moving and storing goods safely

Most fatal accidents in woodworking involve poor handling or stacking.

Do you know . . .

- How and where materials should be stored?
- Who is trained and authorised to drive the lift truck and operate other lifting machinery? What would you do if you saw an unauthorised driver or saw someone riding on the forks?
- Do you and your workers know what can and cannot be lifted manually?
- Do you know the correct ways of lifting, eg are any handling aids used properly?
- How safe are your stacks of timber? How high can they be?
- How safe are your stacks of boards? What prevents them falling?
- Are there any traffic or pedestrian routes in your workshop or department? Do you make sure they are kept clear and used correctly?

Wood dust

Did you know this is one of the main causes of occupational asthma, an incurable disease?

- Do you stop dry sweeping and the use of air lines to clean up dust?
- When do people need to wear respiratory protective equipment and how do you ensure it is worn correctly?
- Have you and your workers been trained to tell if the extraction system is working correctly?
- Is the extraction working properly and controlling the dust?
- Are there any signs of failing performance such as smells, settled dust and visible leaks?
- Are there any unusual noises or vibration coming from it?
- Has the system been tested and does it carry an up-to-date 'test' label?
- Is there some indicator to show it is working properly and taking away all the harmful dust? Remember, some of this may be invisible to the naked eye.

Do you know if any other harmful substances are used in your workshop and, if so, how to control the risks?



Noise

How noisy is your workshop?

- Are you and your workers aware of the risks from noise?
- Did you know good maintenance and tooling can reduce noise levels at source and a reduction of 3 dB halves the noise levels?
- Where in your workshop do people need to wear ear defenders and how do you make sure they are worn?
- What has already been done to reduce noise levels and what further action is planned, such as providing noise enclosures and making sure they are used correctly?

Are you as safety conscious as you thought?

So where do you go from here?

- Find out what your health and safety responsibilities are and their limits. How do these link with the responsibilities of workers and managers? Your job description and the company health and safety policy should help you do this.
- You cannot supervise effectively for health and safety unless you have been properly trained and are competent to supervise or use all woodworking machines under your control. You may need extra specific training and there are recognised courses for supervisors.
- Once you have the necessary knowledge and are sure what your health and safety responsibilities are, you will be able to supervise properly and with confidence. People working for you, regardless of their age or experience, will know you are doing your job well and helping them to do theirs safely.
- Get involved in identifying the hazards in your workplace – help to produce and revise the workplace risk assessment.

Remember: you are a vital link in providing a safe workplace. You are expected to supervise for safety, as well as for quality and productivity, but you will need management support to help you.

Find out more

Safe use of woodworking machinery. Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 as applied to woodworking machinery. Approved Code of Practice and Guidance L114 HSE Books 1998
ISBN 978 0 7176 1630 5

Also see HSE's woodworking website at www.hse.gov.uk/woodworking/index.htm for free information and guidance.



Further information

HSE priced and free publications can be viewed online or ordered from www.hse.gov.uk or contact HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA
Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

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.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 10 from HSE Books, ISBN 978 0 7176 6395 8. Single copies are free and a web version can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg440.pdf.

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