



# WOODNIG NEWS

Newsletter  
of the  
Woodworking  
National Interest Group

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## HSE wood dust survey 2000

**In the December 1999 edition of *WOODNIG NEWS* we announced that HSE was about to carry out a national survey of wood dust exposures in the workplace. It has now been completed and the main findings are summarised below.**

The survey was carried out between January and July 2000 and about 386 personal dust exposure samples were collected from 47 companies. The companies were selected to be representative of the industry as a whole, eg in terms of the different sectors of the woodworking industry, numbers of employees, and the types of wood used.

Of the wood dust samples collected, 27% were above 5 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, ie the maximum exposure limit (MEL) for both hardwood and softwood dusts under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1999. In a similar survey carried out in 1988/89, this figure was 40%, so it appears that there has been an improvement in how well exposures to wood dust are controlled.

However, at only 16 of the 47 sites visited were all exposures found to be below the MEL. This means that 66% of the sites visited had some exposures above the MEL, so there is still considerable room for improvement! The fact that some 13% of sites visited had at least one exposure in excess of 50 mg/m<sup>3</sup> (ie 10 times the MEL) is further evidence of this.

The COSHH Regulations, which first came into force over ten years ago, require extraction systems for controlling wood dust to be thoroughly examined and tested at least once every 14 months. Only 21% of the sites visited were found to be doing this, which indicates that poor

maintenance of extraction systems may be one of the key reasons for high dust exposures.

Other key findings included:

- circular sawing and sanding were the processes with the highest exposures to wood dust (which confirms the findings of the 1988/89 survey);
- only 34% of sites were able to produce a written COSHH assessment;
- the use of compressed air lines for removing wood dust from machinery, workpieces and clothing was seen at 64% of the sites and hand brushing at 96% of the sites. Under COSHH, neither operation should be carried out - for example use an industrial vacuum cleaner with high-efficiency filters instead!
- forty of the sites used respiratory protective equipment (RPE), eg dust masks, as a control measure, however only 7.5% of these had provided training or instruction on how to use it.

The results of the survey will be used to help target future HSE wood dust initiatives. We now have some accurate benchmarks against which to measure improvements.

The existing Woodworking Sheet WIS11 (*Hardwood dust survey*) will be revised to take account of these latest findings. HSE inspectors will be checking whether control measures (including maintenance of extraction systems) are adequate.

# Early findings of the research into wood machine training

A major research report due to be published in 2001 will show that training for users of woodworking machinery is in decline, employers are unsure how to train their employees, and they are confused about the types of training available. As a result, training is increasingly being carried out in-house, often to no particular standard. This leads to bad habits being passed on to trainees, and modern thinking and legal requirements not being properly promoted.

The research *Quality, availability and standards of woodworking machinery training* was commissioned by the WOODNIG and carried out by the Health and Safety Laboratory. The research team obtained details of the numbers and location of places offering relevant woodworking training, held focus groups to find out the views of operators, supervisors and managers from woodworking companies, analysed syllabuses from a range of woodworking courses, and spoke to key people in trade unions, government agencies, trade associations and centres of training excellence.

The WOODNIG believes the research report will be a crucial document for all involved in woodworking machinery training and it will set demanding challenges for improvement.

On the whole, the research will report a gloomy state of affairs. Some key early findings are:

- There seems to be a real gap in training provision for supervisors.
- Some companies are unclear of their legal responsibilities for training.

- Small businesses tend to rely on 'in-house' training which is often relevant to the needs of the business but often does not include enough details on health and safety issues.
- There is a lot of confusion over the availability of funding for training.
- Many colleges of further education listed as offering woodworking training have suspended them.
- Colleges report a decline in requests for places on woodworking courses and short health and safety courses.
- Companies cite a lack of availability of appropriate training.
- College-based training is seen to be too inflexible for the needs of small businesses.
- Numbers of people taking National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are small, compared to the number of people employed in the industry.
- If taking a NVQ, many students do not proceed beyond level 2.

Wood machine operators, assistants and supervisors must be adequately trained. The accident rates are bad enough already and without adequate training they will certainly rise. Safe use of these machines depends on many factors including safe systems of work, correct adjustment of guards, full appreciation of appropriate tooling and a suitable working environment.

The report will be available in spring 2001 and we will include full details of how to obtain it in the next edition of **WOODNIG NEWS**.

## Safe use of hand-fed planing machines

Following on from the introduction of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER 98), we have now revised Woodworking Information Sheet WIS17, *Safe use of hand-fed planing machines*. These machines account for about 20% of all injuries caused by woodworking machinery. A typical machine makes approximately 10 000 cuts per minute, so if a machinist's fingers are in contact with the cutters for only a tenth of a second, 16 slices will be removed!

The revision of the WIS takes account of the changes introduced by PUWER 98 and the associated Approved Code of Practice (ACOP) L114 *Safe use of woodworking machinery*, for example the need to fit

braking by 5 December 2005. The guidance also reflects that in recently published European Standards on hand-fed planing machines (BS EN 859: 1998) and tooling (BS EN 847-1). BS EN 859, for example, requires new planing machines to be designed so that it is not possible to carry out rebating using the end of the cutter block and gives new guidance on the size of the gap between the feed table lips and the cutting circle.

A copy of the revised sheet is included with this edition of **WOODNIG NEWS**. Additional copies are available free from HSE Books, Tel: 01787 881165. A revised version of WIS18, *Safe use of vertical spindle moulding machines*, will be published in early 2001.

## Lessons to be learnt

A Scottish woodworking company was fined £5000 after an employee suffered a broken back and severe crush injuries when a stack of roof trusses fell on him.

The employee (44) was on his first day of work at the factory and had received no induction or training for the job he was to do. The job involved heavy lifting (manual handling) but, despite previous HSE advice, no pre-employment checks or health surveillance had been carried out to see if he was suitable for the work.

He was manufacturing roof trusses with two other employees and propping them against two vertical metal poles set into the concrete floor. As the three men lifted a finished truss and leant it against the stack, one of them kicked a previously stacked truss causing the whole stack to become unstable and fall. Two employees jumped clear but the third was crushed. He was bent double by the weight of trusses on his back with his face and head forced down onto his legs. A total of five trusses with a combined weight of over 1.2 tonnes fell on him, breaking his back in several places.

The company was prosecuted under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 for use of an unsafe system of work, and for not providing adequate training. They were also served with an Improvement Notice requiring mechanical lifting equipment to be installed to help with the handling of heavy roof trusses.

Manual handling of all types needs careful assessment and, where the risk of injury cannot be eliminated, effective solutions have to be put in place. Roof trusses are large, heavy and awkward to carry. Using mechanical lifting equipment significantly reduces the risk of injury.

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 require employers, so far as reasonably practicable, to avoid manual handling operations which involve a risk of injury. If not, then they should take appropriate steps to reduce the risk of injury to the lowest level reasonably practicable. Guidance is available in the HSE leaflet *Manual handling solutions in woodworking* INDG318 (free) and in *Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992. Guidance on Regulations L23* (priced) ISBN 0 7176 2415 3, both available from HSE Books.

## Occupational asthma

Proposals to reduce the number of cases of occupational asthma were published in November in a Health and Safety Commission (HSC) Consultative Document (CD). Each year an estimated 1500 to 3000 people in the UK develop occupational asthma as a result of breathing in substances used in their workplace. The disease may leave people severely disabled and having to take early retirement, while many others may have to change jobs to avoid contact with the substance which caused their asthma. Wood dust is the fourth most common cause of the disease (the most common cause is exposure to isocyanates, which are also found in woodworking).

Tackling occupational asthma is a high priority for HSE - we want to see a marked fall in the numbers of people developing this disabling disease. To have any chance of success, the support of industry is vital - many have said they will work with HSE, including large and small employers, trade unions, local authorities, other Government bodies and health professionals.

HSC's strategy statement *Securing Health Together* and the Deputy Prime Minister's *Revitalising Health and Safety* statement set out targets for improvements in occupational health and safety, including a 20% reduction in the incidence of occupational ill health by 2010.

The consultation period lasts until 16 February 2001. Copies of the Consultative Document *Proposals for reducing the incidence of occupational asthma*, including an Approved Code of Practice *Control of substances that cause occupational asthma*, CD 164, can be ordered online at <http://www.hsebooks.co.uk> or free from HSE Books (see back page). The full text of the CD can be viewed and downloaded from the HSE website: [www.hse.gov.uk/condocs/cd164.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/condocs/cd164.htm)

## READER SURVEY

Many thanks to those of you who returned the reader questionnaire included in the April edition of **WOODNIG NEWS**. We had a very good response with over 150 replies.

Your involvement has given us a better picture of our readership and useful ideas for improving the publication. It was extremely pleasing to see you all found **WOODNIG NEWS** useful and easy to understand. All or most of the publication was of interest to 91% of you. In fact, the highest number of suggestions for changes you would like to see was for **WOODNIG NEWS** to be published more often! We must be doing something right.

The most popular sections in order are:

- News items;
- Lessons to be learnt; and
- New publications.

You have asked for more information on accidents and prosecutions, and more on the changes being brought about by the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER 98). Other common suggestions were for more on training; the legal regulatory framework; and dust extraction. Judging by the results of the dust survey reported in this edition, the latter seems a particularly good idea.

Thanks again for your responses. We will work to develop **WOODNIG NEWS** to include your suggestions. Already in this edition we have included details of a recent case taken as a result of failing to comply with Improvement Notices in addition to our normal 'Lessons to be learnt' article.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM HSE

Details of recently produced HSE publications which may be of interest to the woodworking industry are listed below.

*Safe use of hand-fed planing machines*  
WIS17 (revised)  
HSE Books 2000 (free)

*Back in work. Managing back pain in the workplace: A leaflet for employers and workers in small businesses* INDG333  
HSE Books 2000 (free)

*Safety in working with lift trucks* HSG6 (3rd edition)  
HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1781 5 (£6.50)

*Power-fed mobile wood chippers: Operator protection at infeed chutes* AIS38  
HSE Books 2000 (free)

*Proposals for reducing the incidence of occupational asthma, including an Approved Code of Practice: Control of substances that cause occupational asthma* CD164  
HSE Books 2000 (free)

**All the above publications are available from HSE Books**

## 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](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk)

HSE priced publications are also available from good booksellers.

For other enquiries ring HSE's InfoLine Tel: 08701 545500, or write to HSE's Information Centre, Broad Lane, Sheffield S3 7HQ.  
Website: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

## Ignore Improvement Notices and face heavy fines

Failure to comply with enforcement notices served by inspectors, such as Improvement Notices, frequently leads to heavy penalties in Court.

Following a visit to a factory in Cleveland to investigate a serious accident, the inspector found conditions were poor and so served three Improvement Notices dealing with three separate issues:

- the local exhaust ventilation system to control wood dust had not been thoroughly examined for over five years;
- there was an inadequate rest area for consumption of food; and
- the electrical system of the factory was not maintained to prevent danger.

When the inspector revisited the premises, the employer had not done what was required and in October this year at Guisborough Magistrates' Court, he pleaded guilty for failing to comply with each of the three Notices and was fined £6000 (£2000 for each Notice).

At the same time, the Court heard the case brought as a result of the investigation. The employer had failed to provide a system of work that was safe, and in particular had not provided adequate training, supervision and instruction. He was fined a further £2000 with £800 costs.

Failure to comply with an Improvement Notice is a serious offence. The maximum penalty in the Magistrates' Court is £20 000. In exceptional circumstances, a six-month prison sentence may be given. In the Crown Court an unlimited fine can be imposed along with a two-year prison sentence.

• YOUR VIEWS • YOUR VIEWS • YOUR VIEWS • YOUR VIEWS •

What do you think of **WOODNIG NEWS**?  
What would you like to see in future editions?  
Send your views to Chris Molde at the address below.

• YOUR VIEWS • YOUR VIEWS • YOUR VIEWS • YOUR VIEWS •

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