



HSE Construction Division  
Chief Inspector for Construction: Kevin Myers

## **CONSTRUCTION HEALTHY HANDLING 2005**

Work-related ill health affects significant numbers of construction workers. For example, musculoskeletal disorders are more common in construction than in any other industry. Back problems, cement dermatitis and vibration white finger can ruin lives and force people out of work. Setting aside strong moral and legal implications this does not make business sense in an industry with an ageing workforce facing skills shortages.

During March 2005, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Construction Division will carry out a GB-wide initiative entitled *Healthy Handling 2005*.

Inspectors will then focus on:

- **Order and organisation** fundamental to occupational health management;
- **Lifting and carrying** manual handling of materials and equipment can cause back injury and muscle strain;
- **Wet cement** skin contact may lead to dermatitis and burns;
- **Hand-held vibrating tools** power tools can cause hand-arm vibration syndrome e.g. white finger, and/or hearing loss.

This initiative is intended to assist the industry in addressing these problems.

The following four pages provide advice on key, sensible precautions that Inspectors will expect to find where hazards are present<sup>1</sup>. These matters should be considered by designers, assessed by contractors, and suitable control measures agreed and specified, before work starts.

Enforcement action, including prohibition of work and prosecution, may be taken where effective precautions are not in place. Inspectors may also intervene where clients, designers or planning supervisors have not complied with their CDM duties.

However, by giving this advice we hope to find that such action is unnecessary. Please review what you are currently doing in the light of the advice in these pages. With a concerted effort we can, working together, make long-term improvements to the health of construction workers.

**KEVIN MYERS**  
**CHIEF INSPECTOR FOR CONSTRUCTION**

February 2005

<sup>1</sup> This advice has been prepared to assist dutyholders during the HSE initiative *Healthy Handling 2005*. Other free information is available from the *HSE Infoline* on 08701 545500 and from the *HSE website* at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) Priced publications can be obtained from *HSE Books* on Tel: 01787 881165 or Fax: 01787 313995.

If you wish to discuss the contents please contact *Healthy Handling Helpline* on ☎ 01582 444248 or email ✉ [infolnet@hse.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:infolnet@hse.gsi.gov.uk) You will not be asked your name, company or project details, however an Inspector will be happy to help.

## CONSTRUCTION HEALTHY HANDLING 2005

### Poor site order:

#### CONSIDER ...

- untidy conditions
- blocked ladder access
- unsafe storage
- trip and slip hazards



### Order and organisation

Disorderly sites and poor organisation can result in serious injury from slips and trips and longer term disability arising from musculo-skeletal disorders

#### HSE INSPECTORS WILL EXPECT TO FIND:

- clean, tidy and well organised sites that are kept in good order;
- pedestrian access routes and places of work kept free from obstructions;
- materials stored and left in a safe and accessible condition.

#### TOP TIPS

Plan and organise storage and delivery areas before work starts

Design scaffolds to keep building entrances clear

Tidy as you go and at the end of each working day

Provide rubbish chutes to remove waste from working platforms

**Further guidance - Free from HSE website [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) or 08701 545500 (unless marked \*)**

[Preventing slips trips and falls at work - INDG 225L](#)

[The absolutely essential health and safety tool kit - INDG 344](#)

Slips and trips: guidance for employers on identifying hazards and controlling risk - HSG 155 \*

Health and safety in construction - HSG 150 \*

## CONSTRUCTION HEALTHY HANDLING 2005

### Unsafe lifting technique:

#### CONSIDER ...

- mechanising the task
- use of lifting aids
- assessment of the task, individual, load and environment
- training requirements
- specification of lighter components



### Lifting and carrying

Manual handling can cause serious, long-term disabling musculo-skeletal injuries. Heavy blocks, kerbs, cills and lintels present a particularly high risk

#### HSE INSPECTORS WILL EXPECT TO FIND:

- manual handling tasks eliminated by design or mechanisation where practicable;
- safe handling based on assessment of risk from manual handling operations;
- all workers trained in basic safe manual handling techniques.

#### TOP TIPS

Design-in safe lifting points for lintels and cills and identify the weight of all items to be manually handled, using lighter components where practicable

Use mechanical means to deliver materials to the point of use

Organise scaffolding to make block laying easier, for example by providing tables or half lifts to minimise bending and twisting

Use mechanical placement aids, e.g. vacuum lifts for kerbs and slabs

**Further guidance - Free from HSE website [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) or 08701 545500 (unless marked \*)**

[Are you making the best use of lifting and handling aids – INDG 398](#)

[Handling heavy building blocks - CIS 37](#)

[Manual handling assessment charts - INDG 383](#)

[Getting to grips with manual handling: a short guide - INDG 143](#)

[Kerb handling - HSE Press release E103-05 -19 July 2004](#)

[Kerb handling - HSE Site Safe News 7 May 2004](#)

[Backs for the future, safe manual handling in construction - HSG 149 \\*](#)

## CONSTRUCTION HEALTHY HANDLING 2005

### Cement dermatitis:

#### CONSIDER ...

- dermatitis is a disabling condition that can end careers
- caused by allergic reaction or irritation
- one in ten persons susceptible
- reduced by preventing exposure



### Wet cement

Dermatitis and burns can be caused by contact with cement and cement products  
Brick and block layers are especially at risk from contact with mortar

#### HSE INSPECTORS WILL EXPECT TO FIND:

- **assessment of risks from cement and management arrangements to control exposure;**
- **hot and cold running water, adequate sized basins, means of washing and drying hands;**
- **regular skin inspections by a trained, competent person where there is residual risk.**

#### TOP TIPS

Consider use of suitable gloves

Keep hands clean by regular use of suitable welfare facilities provided as soon as work starts on site

Provide and use pre and post work hand creams

Manage welfare facilities to keep them clean and working properly at all times

Encourage workers to report any occurrence of dermatitis

**Further guidance - Free from HSE website [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) or 08701 545500 (unless marked \*)**

[Cement - CIS 26 Rev 2](#)

[Welfare provision at fixed construction sites - CIS 18](#)

[Welfare provision at transient construction sites - CIS 46](#)

[Preventing dermatitis at work: advice for employers and employees - INDG 233](#)

[Understanding health surveillance at work - INDG 304](#)

Health surveillance at work - HSG 61 \*

Rash decisions - HSE Video \*



## CONSTRUCTION HEALTHY HANDLING 2005

### Hand-arm vibration syndrome:

#### CONSIDER ...

- HAVS is an irreversible condition affecting nerves and circulation caused by vibration
- effect is cumulative - each exposure can worsen the condition
- harm can be caused by as little as 15 minutes exposure per day for some tools
- risk can be eliminated / reduced by controlling exposure



### Hand held vibrating equipment and tools

Vibration white finger and noise induced hearing loss can be caused by use of hand held vibrating equipment and tools

#### HSE INSPECTORS WILL EXPECT TO FIND:

- **information on vibration and noise levels from manufacturers and hire companies;**
- **risk assessments carried out using the levels to determine safe periods of exposure;**
- **equipment and tools kept in good condition by effective maintenance systems.**

#### TOP TIPS

Design-out the need for vibrating hand tools, e.g. for pile cap removal and scabbling

Establish a hire and purchasing policy that gives preference to low vibration / noise emission equipment and tools

Green, amber and red labels on power tools can indicate increasing vibration levels, and help to control / monitor exposure periods

If people have difficulty speaking to each other at two metres apart then you may have a noise problem

**Further guidance - Free from HSE website [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) or 08701 545500 (unless marked \*)**

[Hand-arm vibration: advice for employees and the self-employed - INDG 126 rev](#)

[Hand-arm vibration syndrome: pocket card for employees - INDG 296P](#)

[Health risks from hand-arm vibration: advice for employers - INDG 175 rev](#)

[Noise in construction - INDG 127 rev](#)

[Understanding health surveillance at work - INDG 304](#)

[Protect your hearing or lose it - INDG 363](#)

Hand-arm Vibration - HSG 88 \*

Health surveillance at work - HSG 61 \*