

Revitalising health and safety

In June, the Government and the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) announced targets to reduce work-related deaths, ill health and injury in Great Britain. A new document, *Revitalising health and safety - Strategy statement*, was published to give a new impetus to health and safety at work in all industries. Accidents and ill health among the workforce cost the economy up to £18 billion a year.

By 2010 the specific targets are to:

- reduce the number of working days lost from work-related injury and ill health by 30%;
- reduce the incidence of people suffering from work-related ill health by 20%;
- reduce the rate of fatal and major injury accidents by 10%; and
- achieve half of each improvement by the year 2004.

The publication introduces a ten-point strategy supported by a 44-point action plan which will provide incentives and practical support to employers, together with a range of measures to tackle employers who do not meet their health and safety responsibilities.

The strategy highlights that the health and safety system must promote a better working environment as well as prevent harm. It focuses on occupational health as a priority; the need to motivate all employers (particularly small firms) to improve their health and safety performance; the need for Government to lead by example; the importance of education at all levels for improving health and safety; and the role of effective design in preventing risk.

What does this mean for the wood industries?

In the wood industry since 1996, 24 people have been killed, 2500 have suffered major injuries and over 11 000

people have suffered an accident at work resulting in absence for at least three days. The accident incidence rate in the wood industries is 30% higher than manufacturing industry as a whole and twice as high as the national average.

We all know woodworking machines generate high noise levels and the early results of a major wood dust survey currently underway found that a quarter of the samples taken exceeded the maximum exposure level. There is clearly room for improvement!

Over the next few months we will be working in partnership with leading industry bodies and Trade Unions to prepare a strategy to meet the national targets, but individual companies and organisations should also do their bit.

You can take the first steps now in consultation with your employees and Trade Union safety representatives, by:

- looking carefully at manual handling tasks and taking action to avoid them or minimise the risk of injury (see *Manual handling solutions in woodworking* INDG318, available free from HSE Books);
- checking woodworking machinists are adequately trained and whether experienced workers need refresher training (see *Safe use of woodworking machinery* Approved Code of Practice and guidance L114 ISBN 0 7176 1630 4, available from HSE Books);
- ensuring that dust extraction systems are working effectively;
- taking action to comply with the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 (see *Reducing noise at work: Guidance on the Noise at Work Regulations 1989* L108 ISBN 0 7176 1511 1, available from HSE Books);

- checking risks posed by vehicles including fork-lift trucks are properly controlled (see *Managing vehicle safety in the workplace* INDG199, available free from HSE Books); and
- that timber is safely stacked.

It is essential to take effective action on these matters if the toll of injury and ill health and resulting cost in the woodworking industry are to be reduced.

Copies of *Revitalising health and safety - Strategy statement* are available from DETR Free Literature, PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7NB Tel: 0870 1226 236 or Fax: 0870 1226 237.

Explosive Atmospheres Directive - 3 years until impact

Every year there are a number of incidents involving ignition of dense wood dust clouds causing explosions in dust extraction systems. Most do not cause serious injuries or damage, but there are real risks if you are close to a piece of equipment at the time.

In the wood industry, the most serious incidents are liable to occur with large dust collectors attached to sanding machines, or other sources of fine dust, for example routers. A common precaution with the larger dust collectors is to fit explosion relief vents or panels.

The European Explosive Atmospheres Directive (ATEX) was passed in 1994 and became UK law in 1996, with a transition period up to June 2003. It places controls on suppliers of equipment, and sets out essential safety features for many products where there is an explosion risk.

In the wood industry it has an impact on equipment fitted with explosion vents and on those who make vent panels and electrical equipment intended to be used in very dusty places, eg inside dust collection systems.

Explosion vent panels and doors are classed as 'autonomous protective systems' and from 2003 during design and manufacture they will need to be properly tested by an independent laboratory. This means in future if a user has to replace a failed panel, or modify their system, a properly CE-marked panel will be needed. Panels made in house from hardboard or galvanised sheet will not be suitable.

A European Standard is being produced which will detail the test methods for panels and doors and will also

standardise the design rules for deciding the size of explosion vent panels.

This should help suppliers of large dust extraction plant to sell their equipment across Europe without coming across differing requirements in each member country.

Electrical equipment used in dusty areas will need to be built to appropriate standards, and some of this will also need to be independently tested. If you use paints or varnishes containing highly flammable solvents, there will be additional requirements for the equipment that can be used nearby.

For those who wish to read more, a guide to this directive can be downloaded from the European Commission website at:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg03/directs/dg3d/d1/eleng/index.htm>

Further information is also available from: Alan Tyldesley (Tel: 0151 951 4769) in HSE's Technology Division.

Following on from ATEX there is a second ATEX directive setting out the steps that the user needs to take to prevent explosions. This too should come into force in 2003, when nearly all the safety law relating to flammable substances is being revised.

We will keep you informed in future editions of *WOODNIG NEWS*.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT?

A woodworking company in Huddersfield was fined £5000 plus £574 costs following an accident to an employee who fell through a fragile rooflight while carrying out minor repairs to the factory roof.

The employee (31) had gone on to the roof to repair a leak. The roof was covered with double skin steel sheets which were not fragile, but there were a number of fragile rooflights. The rooflights were 2 m apart. As he was carrying out the repair he accidentally stood on one of the rooflights and fell approximately 6 m to the floor below. He suffered major back injuries including three fractured vertebra. He was extremely fortunate to have survived.

The investigation revealed that minor roof maintenance was part of his job and employees had not received any instruction or training.

The company was prosecuted under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 for allowing an employee to use an unsafe system of work and for failing to provide a means of protection to prevent employees from falling through fragile materials.

Any work on a roof is high risk. On average, 21% of fatal accidents and 17% of major injuries in woodworking are a result of falls from a height. All roofwork activity, no matter how short, should be properly assessed and planned. The risks have to be identified and controlled.

Often specialist equipment is required (for example 600 mm wide support platforms with edge protection). Any fragile material needs to be identified and covered if it is within 2 m of the working area or access route. Guidance is available in the HSE leaflet *Working on roofs* INDG284 (free) and in HSG33 *Health and safety in roofwork* (ISBN 0 7176 1425 5 £8.50), both available from HSE Books.

Investigation campaign - Machinery accidents

In 1996/97 there was a significant rise in the number of reported woodworking machinery accidents, and statistics show that 50% of these accidents involved people under 30. HSE inspectors and local authority environmental health officers are currently working together to investigate **all** reported injuries to employees aged 25 or under who were using certain categories of woodworking machine.

The campaign is focusing on four categories of machine: circular bench/dimension saws, planers (surfacers, thicknessers and combined), vertical spindle moulders (including high-speed routers) and narrow band saws, which account for 73% of all woodworking machinery accidents. Injuries to those aged 25 and under on these machines will be investigated in all sectors of industry, eg from sawmilling and furniture manufacture to education, prisons and builders/DIY merchants.

To identify any common trends in accident causation, a number of factors will be looked at during each investigation. These will include training, supervision, safeguarding and maintenance of machinery, machine design and workplace layout.

The campaign will also help promote the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER 98) and the *Safe use of woodworking machinery* Approved Code of Practice and guidance L114 ISBN 0 7176 1630 4, available from HSE Books. The findings will be used to focus future HSE initiatives and guidance.

Health and safety policy document guide

HSE has produced a new guidance leaflet aimed at helping small firms to prepare a health and safety policy statement. The purpose of such a statement is to set out how health and safety is to be managed. It shows **who** does **what**, and **when** and **how** they do it.

It is a long-standing legal requirement for businesses employing five or more people to have a written health and safety policy. It should set out the general policy on health and safety at work and the arrangements for putting the policy into practice.

The new guidance contains an outline health and safety policy statement which can be completed and used as a way of complying with the law. It is designed to be filled in and kept. Obviously what is written in the policy statement has to be put into practice - the true test of a health and safety policy is what happens in the workplace, not how well the statement is written.

The leaflet *Stating your business - guidance on preparing a health and safety document for small firms* (INDG324) is available free from HSE Books.

Frequently asked questions: What is adequate training?

Adequate training has been a legal requirement for many years for machine operators and those who are assisting (ie taking off). More recently as a result of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER 98), employees who **supervise** or **manage** the use of woodworking equipment must also have received adequate training.

'Adequate training' is achieved when the individual has completed the following:

- General - safety skills and knowledge common to all woodworking processes, for example good housekeeping, isolation and awareness of dangers such as kickback, dropping on etc.
- Machine specific - the main risks with the type of machine and tasks for which it is best suited, including safe working practices, use and adjustment of guards, protection devices, appliances, correct selection and fitting of tooling, and the use of manual brakes where fitted.
- Familiarisation - training specific to the particular job or task under close supervision.

Training requirements will vary depending on the skills and aptitude of the employee and also on the final task or tasks the person is expected to carry out. For example, a general wood machinist will require a structured programme over a period of

time, whereas an operative only working with an interlocked planer/moulder and not involved in its setting or maintenance will still require adequate training, but in less depth.

Once trained, the candidate should go through an assessment process to check he or she can demonstrate competence in the tasks to be done, including the adoption of safe and healthy working practices. Once competent, the company should formally authorise the operative in writing and keep appropriate records. Much more detail on training is given in the *Safe use of woodworking machinery* Approved Code of Practice and guidance L114 ISBN 0 7176 1630 4, available from HSE Books.

HSE is sometimes asked whether National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) satisfy the Regulations and Act. On their own, they probably do not. NVQs are outcome-based, for example showing the student can produce a test piece such as a shaped chair leg. In attaining the qualification they may have only used a limited range of machines and then only for particular tasks. It is vital the employee is further assessed by the employer to check competence can be demonstrated for all aspects of the work they are expected to do.

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

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

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What would you like to see in future editions?
Send your views to Chris Molde at the address below.

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NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM HSE

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

Chainsaws at work INDG317 HSE Books 2000 (free)

Stating your business. Guidance on preparing a health and safety policy document for small firms INDG324 HSE Books 2000 (free)

Need help on health and safety? Guidance for employers on when and how to get advice on health and safety INDG322 HSE Books 2000 (free)

Working platforms on fork-lift trucks Guidance Note PM28 (second edition) HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1233 3 (£6.00)

Occupational exposure limits 2000 Guidance Note EH40/2000 HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1730 0 (£9.50)

General ventilation in the workplace HSG202 HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1793 9 (£4.00)

General methods for sampling and gravimetric analysis of respirable and inhalable dust (revised) MDHS14/3 HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1749 1 (£12.00)

All these publications are available from HSE Books.

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