

Metalworking Fluids (MWF)

HSE Expectations

The HSE have recently been inspecting premises that use Metalworking Fluids (MWF).

Exposure to MWF via inhaled mist can cause occupational asthma and hypersensitivity pneumonitis in workers.

Skin exposure to MWF can cause skin irritation and dermatitis.

Health surveillance for skin and lung disease should be provided where there is a reasonable likelihood of disease occurring in the workplace.

There is no known safe level of exposure to MWF and levels must be reduced to as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP). This should be via the use of control measures to reduce employee exposure and the implementation of the correct maintenance and testing of MWF.

Staff will need to be provided with instruction and training regarding the hazards, control measures, cleaning and maintenance procedures, how to report faults, concerns or signs of ill-health.

The latest 'Good Practice Guide for Safe Handling and Disposal of Metalworking Fluids' (HSE and UKLA) outlines how to manage MWF risks.

Ensuring Compliance

All duty-holders who use MWF must ensure effective engineering controls (e.g., LEV, barriers) are provided, correctly used, suitably maintained, and reviewed regularly.

The use of compressed air should be avoided, or exposure minimised e.g., using an extracted booth and reducing air pressure.

Suitable control measures for high-speed machines that use MWF include the use of engineering controls such as local exhaust ventilation (LEV) which has undergone statutory testing (TEXT).

Time delays on the opening of doors should be programmed into machine cycles to avoid reliance on the operator, and checked using smoke generators and dust lamps, particle counters may also be useful as an indicative measure.

MWF maintenance checks should include; MWF odour, appearance, pH, and concentration, operating temperatures, tramp oil, circulation and flow, metal swarf and fines, microbial growth, and appropriate use of biocides.

Qualitative assessments, air monitoring surveys, fluid monitoring/management and TEXT by an occupational hygienist can help to determine how effective your control measures are, helping you to protect your workforce and remain compliant.

An occupational hygienist can help to determine if you are compliant and protecting your staff adequately