

Wood Dust – What You Need to Know

Exposure to wood dust can cause asthma, dermatitis and cancer.

The HSE's WD series of control guidance sheets describe what is expected for controlling exposure to wood dust to an adequate level. This will involve a variety of approaches which may include;

- Reducing the amount of dust generated in the first place
- Using control measures to ensure you remove dust from the workplace before it can spread, e.g. with local exhaust ventilation (LEV), that is correctly designed, installed, used and maintained
- If respiratory protective equipment (RPE) is necessary in addition to other control measures, ensure that it is adequate and suitable for the task and worker, fit tested if required, and is correctly used, maintained and stored
- Providing adequate information, instruction and training for your staff on the hazards, control measures, cleaning and maintenance procedures, how to report faults, concerns or signs of ill-health
- Completing health surveillance for all workers exposed to wood dust
- Regularly checking and reviewing all elements of your control measures to ensure they are still effective

HSE – What Inspectors Are Looking For

In your workshop:

- What is the general tidiness of the workshop like? Is there a build-up of off-cuts or dust?
- Is the machinery well maintained? With the correct safeguards?
- Are staff competent users of machinery? Can you show proof of this?
- Have safety issues been considered? e.g. Work at height
- Have health issues been considered? e.g. wood dust inhalation, noise, skin exposure, manual handling / ergonomics

In your paperwork:

- Suitable and sufficient COSHH risk assessments, that are reviewed regularly to ensure efficacy of control measures
- Health surveillance records, dependent on the type of wood dust this can vary from questionnaires to lung function testing
- Evidence of testing and maintenance of engineering control measures such as local exhaust ventilation (LEV) etc.
- Evidence of staff confirming their understanding training provided

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