



Urgent Sector Update

October 2022



WOOD SAFETY GROUP MEMBERS



As a result of recent HSE inspections, this urgent guidance has been issued by the Wood Safety Group and is aimed at ALL sectors (including education providers, prisons, maintenance departments) using woodworking machinery.

WOOD DUST WHEN USING MACHINES

Wood dust can cause:

- *asthma – both hardwoods and softwoods are asthmagens and users are 4 times more likely to develop asthma than other workers*
- *nasal cancer – hardwoods are classed as a carcinogen*
- *dermatitis – caused by skin contact with wood dusts, lichen, sap and chemicals including glues, adhesives and coatings.*

Adequate control of wood dust is achieved when the eight principles of good control practice are met by applying all the expected controls established in COSHH* essential sheets, or by using other equally effective measures to ensure exposure is being controlled to as low as reasonably practicable.

Although the health effects from exposure to hardwood, softwood and composite woods are different (and the specific WELs* are different), the measures required to adequately control exposure do not differ by the type of wood being machined.

LEV* is the main control to ensure that wood dust is controlled at the source on woodworking machines. LEV must be installed and be sufficient for the machines and operations being carried out. This LEV must be thoroughly tested at least every 14 months to ensure it is working efficiently and regularly maintained.

ACHIEVEMENT OF ALARP (As Low as Reasonably Practicable).

On certain machines, LEV alone will not control residual dust produced from machining operations. On these machines, users are required to wear RPE* in addition to LEV.

Both LEV and suitable RPE (minimum APF* of 20 e.g. FFP3*) are required to achieve adequate control on these machines.

- *BANDSAW*
- *CIRCULAR SAW*
- *CROSSCUT SAW*
- *CHOP SAW*
- *WALL SAW*
- *SURFACE PLANER*
- *OVERHEAD ROUTER & CNC ROUTER*
- *FIXED SANDING MACHINE*



*NOTE

- *COSHH - Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations*
- *WEL - Workplace Exposure Limits*
- *LEV - Local Exhaust Ventilation*
- *RPE - Respiratory Protective Equipment*
- *APF - Assigned Protection Factor*
- *FFP3 - FFP3 protection is the highest level of protection available*



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

Users on these machines listed **MUST** wear RPE in addition to normal use of effective extraction.

This RPE must be of the correct type (FFP3) and users must undergo Face Fit Testing to ensure the RPE is fitting correctly.

The use of RPE does not replace the need for efficient LEV systems.

Users includes all users of these machines, including learners, apprentices, educational staff & trainers

Do I need to wear RPE if I only have 1 piece of wood to cut on a cross cut saw?



In this example, it is probably impractical to wear RPE when using the machine for one infrequent cut.

However, as each operation is different, employers will need to risk assess the machine and operation to determine the correct action.

USE OF POWERED HAND-SANDERS

Both on-tool extraction/portable LEV and suitable RPE (minimum APF of 20 e.g. FFP3) are required to achieve adequate control on these machines. An M or H-type vacuum is to be used.



FACE FIT TESTING



Fit testing basics

Where respiratory protective equipment (RPE) is used, it must be able to provide adequate protection for individual wearers. RPE can't protect the wearer if it leaks. A major cause of leaks is poor fit – tight-fitting facepieces need to fit the wearer's face to be effective.

As people come in all sorts of shapes and sizes it is unlikely that one particular type or size of RPE facepiece will fit everyone. Fit testing will ensure that the equipment selected is suitable for the wearer.

RPE fit testing is to be conducted by a competent person - you should take steps to ensure that person who carries out the fit test is appropriately trained, qualified and experienced, and is provided with appropriate information to undertake each particular task.

A note on facial hair

Many masks rely on a good seal against the face so that, when you breathe air in, it is drawn into the filter material where the air is cleaned. If there are any gaps around the edges of the mask, 'dirty' air will pass through these gaps and into your lungs. It is therefore very important that you put your mask on correctly and check for a good fit every time.

Facial hair – stubble and beards – make it impossible to get a good seal of the mask to the face.

If you are clean-shaven when wearing tight-fitting masks (ie those which rely on a good seal to the face), this will help prevent leakage of contaminated air around the edges of the mask and into your lungs. You will therefore be breathing in clean air, which will help you stay healthy.

If there are good reasons for having a beard (eg for religious reasons), alternative forms of RPE, that do not rely on a tight fit to the face, are available.

For additional information on Face Fit Testing, please visit

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/fit-testing-basics.htm>

OTHER REQUIREMENTS FOR RPE

RPE (minimum APF of 20 e.g. FFP3)



- Manual sanding (e.g. use of sandpaper, sanding blocks etc.)
- Changing dust extraction bags or maintaining woodworking machines
- Other portable power tools
- Employees working in residual dust areas (produced from other workers processes)

CLEANING OF SURFACES

A dust class M or H-type vacuum cleaner, or a suction hose attached to the LEV should be used to clear wood dust.

Dry sweeping or using **compressed air** are not acceptable methods for the collection or clearing of wood dust. Larger wood chips or offcuts can be shovelled or alternatively pre-filters/mesh can be used to prevent blockage issues on vacuum cleaners and LEV attachments.

NOTE

Thorough LEV testing and examination applies to on-tool extraction and Class M and H vacuum cleaners



HEALTH SURVEILLANCE

There is evidence of asthma and dermatitis in the wood sector from exposure to wood dust and some glues, adhesives and coatings, and from handling wood that is not fully dried.

There is also evidence of hearing damage being suffered by woodworkers. PPE cannot be guaranteed to be fully effective in avoiding exposure.

Unless the risk assessment demonstrates occupational asthma, dermatitis and hearing damage are not likely to occur under the particular work conditions and there is no residual risk following the implementation of control measures, there should be a health surveillance programme in place.

Employers should seek advice from an occupational health professional who has the relevant competence, skills and experience for the health risks in wood working.

Health surveillance would normally consist of:

- a questionnaire and lung function assessment for all workers who could breathe in substances that can cause occupational asthma.
- a questionnaire and skin inspection for workers who could have repeated skin contact leading to dermatitis, including those who wear gloves/PPE (e.g. latex, nitrile) as a control measure.
- involves testing the hearing of workers who have regular daily or weekly exposure to noise levels at or above the upper exposure action value of 85dB(A) or who are classed as vulnerable by a health professional.



NOISE CONTROL

Employers are required to carry out a noise assessment on woodworking machine, power hand tools and other operations that create high levels of noise.

This will also include the processes carried out as these will vary and will have different noise levels depending upon the material, tooling and cutting processes.

Once completed, employers will need to take appropriate action to reduce noise levels to individuals, which include engineering controls and wearing of PPE.

Factors that could reduce noise levels on machines.

- improved maintenance
- changing of tooling to more modern design *
- enclosing machine / process

*NOTE

It is possible to replace tooling on machines to new designs which reduce noise levels. This includes saw blades, where they greatly reduce noise levels (Cross Cuts, Circular Saws, Chop Saws)

On some planers (surfacer and thicknesser), some manufacturers have developed new style blocks which reduce noise level. However, you will need to engage with these manufacturers, as not all machines are able to be converted.

Spindles, Tenoners, Four Sided Planers. New style blocks are lighter and have improved cutter actions which reduce noise levels.

Where new tooling is fitted, employers should risk assess for any additional risk that maybe present by making machine quieter. This may include additional training, fitting of warning lights that a machine is running etc.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact your trade association for additional information or questions you might have relating to any of the above information.

Visit HSE Website, where there are additional resources, which are free to download and use.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/woodworking/index.htm>

