

Health and Safety Bulletin

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)

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MSDs are injuries and disorders that affect the human body's movement or musculoskeletal system – affecting the joints and tissues in the upper or lower limbs and the back. The HSE has identified MSDs as one of their priority health plans, having concluded that they account for 41% of all ill health cases and 34% of all working days lost due to ill health. MSD risks should be identified through task risk assessments.

Upper Limb Disorders (ULDs)

ULDs (the upper limbs include all of the arm or the neck) are commonly caused by repetitive work over a long duration involving the worker holding an uncomfortable position and the use of force – such as gripping, holding, bending and twisting. This type of activity tends to result in damage to soft tissue, muscles, tendons and ligaments, or the circulatory and nerve system. A common condition associated with ULDs is carpal tunnel syndrome.

The HSE developed the Assessment of Repetitive Tasks (ART) tool (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg438.pdf>) to help analyse any activity with a significant risk of ULD, which in turn should also suggest effective risk controls.

Lower Limb Disorders (LLDs)

LLDs that can be work-related include hip and knee osteoarthritis; knee bursitis, meniscal lesions/tears; stress fracture/reaction injury and varicose veins. These conditions are commonly caused by work that involves repetitive kneeling and/or squatting, fixed postures (e.g. standing continuously for more than two hours) or frequent jumping from a height.

The conditions are less common than ULDs and so the HSE has not developed a specific assessment tool – however, since the risk of the conditions tend to increase with the duration or frequency of exposure, the most effective control measures focus on reducing these for example, by providing mechanical aids or anti-fatigue mats.

Back Pain

Back pain is caused by both work-related and non work-related activities or by general wear and tear (e.g. people getting older). Muscle or ligament sprains and strains can be caused by over-activity; herniated (“slipped”) intervertebral discs by repetitive handling heavy weights or poor posture. Various leaflets explaining the conditions and potential treatment routes are available from the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/about-orthoinfo/OrthoInfo-Basics/basics-handouts/>).

The HSE has developed the Manual Handling Assessment Charts (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.htm>) to help with the assessment of these risks, however these do not produce a suitable and sufficient assessment complying with the Manual Handling Operations Regulations. There is an assessment within L23 – the guidance on the regulations which achieves the legal standard.

The HSE has also developed the RAPP tool (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg478.htm>) for assessing tasks that involve pushing and pulling.

Conclusion

As part of their work prioritizing strategy for MSDs, HSE has recently reviewed and republished many of their freely downloadable leaflets on MSDs (these were highlighted in the health and safety information column in the February 2020 Bulletin), but the summary of their strategy for this health priority (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/strategiesandplans/health-and-work-strategy/musculoskeletal-disorders.pdf>) also includes the bullet points of how they intend to “secure effective management and control of risk”:-

- prioritising interventions, inspection activity and enforcement on those sectors/activities where MSDs pose the greatest risks and evaluating these findings to inform future approaches;
- maximising the effectiveness of investigations and publicity arising from enforcement outcomes

So, the programme of inspections is unlikely to be far behind!

Recently issued health and safety information:

- INDG73(rev4)
Protecting lone workers: How to manage the risks of working alone
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>
- AM1 Asbestos in some types of marble and other stone: assessing the risk
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/am1.pdf>
- HSE's chemical hazard poster
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/chemicals-poster.pdf>
- HSE's poster on how to use disposable RPE
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/disposable-respirator.pdf>
- HAS's new online traffic management plan for construction
<https://www.besmart.ie/news/item/144/construction-site-traffic-management-plan-cstmp/>
- Mental health in agriculture
<https://www.hseni.gov.uk/sites/hseni.gov.uk/files/the-little-book-of-minding-your-head.pdf>

EH40/2005 WELs updated

In January 2020 the HSE issued an updated version of EH40/2005 – the Workplace Exposure Limits (WELs).

A WEL is not a target – it is the maximum concentration of an airborne substance averaged over a reference period (known as a time weighted average (TWA)) to which

workers may be exposed by inhalation. Under COSHH, employers have a duty to prevent or control exposure to hazardous substances but must not exceed the WEL.

The new or revised WELs included in the updated publication includes: -

- Hardwood dusts

- Chromium (VI) compounds
- Refractory ceramic fibres
- Ethylene oxide

EH40/2005 is available at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/eh40.pdf>.

Case Law update

This issue focuses on cases involving MSDs

Suez Recycling and Recovery Limited was fined **£144,000** and ordered to pay costs of **£32,000** after a worker suffered from a back injury after manually moving gantry steps weighing over 950kg. The HSE investigation found that manually moving and realigning steps was a regular occurrence and that employees would use a scaffold pole under the steps to relocate them. Senior staff knew how the steps were moved and that employees had concerns, as it had been reported, yet no suitable assessment had been carried out, or safe system of work implemented, to avoid

hazardous handling. No equipment or handling aids had been considered to help employees manoeuvre the steps

An apprentice was injured after the wheel of a JCB digger fell onto him – leaving him with broken bones in both feet. During the prosecution, the Magistrates Court was told the employee was tasked with changing air-filled wheels with foam wheels on a machine - each wheel weighed more than 400kg. The HSE investigation found the company did not have any handling equipment for wheels, had not assessed the operation and had not trained workers on how to handle wheels. **Holt JCB Limited**

pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 4(1) of the Manual Handling Regulations 1992 and was fined **£67,000** with **£2929** costs

Leyland SDM (LSDM) Limited was fined after four workers fell more than three and a half metres whilst carrying a ventilation unit. Two of the four injured men suffered leg fractures, while a broken collar bone was among the other injuries caused by the incident. LSDM were redeveloping a warehouse when the working platform became overloaded and gave way - neither the work at height nor the lifting operations were planned properly. The company were fined **£450,000** and ordered to pay costs of

HSE's response to COVID-19

Unsurprisingly HSE has suspended many of the intervention activities that involve inspectors visiting sites during the pandemic. HSE has also identified legal standards that currently remain in force and those where there will be some short-term relaxation.

- Statutory inspections (e.g. lifting equipment, pressure systems, LEV) – the HSE has issued a statement confirming that there is no relaxation of the requirement for statutory inspections/testing and the industry body SAFed (representing the UK independent engineering inspection and certification industry) has indicated that

they are categorised as key/critical workers

- 1st aid cover – if there are fewer workers on site you may need less first aid cover – however this should be demonstrated through an updated 1st aid risk assessment. Workers trained in first aid may add a 3-month extension to their qualifications, if their certification expired after 16th March 2020, but must be able to demonstrate they attempted to arrange training
- Drivers must still be given access to welfare facilities in any premises where they

work

- Health surveillance required under COSHH should be continued at the agreed schedule but may be replaced with remote types of monitoring (e.g. questionnaire instead of lung function test). The full assessment can currently be deferred for up to three months
- Face fit tests must still be carried out for any worker who is required to wear a tight-fitting respirator, although fit testers should follow social distancing guidance. Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19



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