

## H13 – Toolbox Talk

### Vibration at Work

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Vibration can affect the whole body, but most commonly it affects the hands and arms. Vibration white finger (VWF) can result from the transmission of vibration from a vibrating implement (ie road-breakers, chain saws, riveting guns, etc) to the hands, occurring as a result of regular exposure.

Vibration can cause serious and disabling injuries, but many operatives are unaware of the risks. Primarily, it results in damage to the blood vessels and nerves of the hand, resulting in skin blanching (white finger) on exposure to cold, together with pain, pins and needles, numbness and loss of manual dexterity. If you are affected, you will suffer symptoms on exposure to cold conditions with the time taken for recovery increasing as the condition develops.

The condition may become permanent if early symptoms are not identified and action taken. It is important to recognise that these symptoms do not necessarily occur during or immediately after exposure to vibration, but usually occur early in the morning when the weather is cold. Therefore, cold is the primary trigger for the symptoms.

If you smoke, you are at increased risk since smoking reduces the supply of oxygenated blood to your hands and fingers.

The main way to prevent VWF is to reduce levels of vibration by careful selection of equipment (some equipment has in-built vibration absorbers), the introduction of damping techniques on existing equipment if practicable, the use of alternative work procedures if possible, and to minimise the time working with vibrating machinery by job rotation.

You should also follow these simple precautions:

- If using work equipment that causes vibration, then plan the task so that it is broken up with other activities, or rotate the task amongst several employees
- Wear adequate clothing to keep dry and maintain hand and body temperature at an acceptable level, and wear suitable gloves to keep your hands warm. Anti-vibration gloves are available which can reduce exposure. Note: Heavily padded gloves do not protect against vibration and can even increase the effects of vibration as people grip harder
- Let the machine do the work and grip the handle as lightly as possible, providing that this is consistent with safe working practice
- Do not use blunt tools. Keep steels sharp and use the appropriate tool for the job
- The first sign may simply be tingling in the fingers, but signs can also include fatigue, irritation and loss of concentration, thus increasing the general risks to safety at work. Should attacks of white or blue finger, or long periods of tingling and/or numbness occur, report this to your supervisor
- Inform your supervisor if abnormal vibration occurs when using your machine
- If you think you are suffering from the effects of vibration, then stop the activity immediately and speak to your supervisor. If necessary, seek medical advice.



**Training register**

Date .....

Name of attendee

Signature

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