

## H14 – Opening Statement

### Work-Related Upper Limb Disorders

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The term upper limb disorder encompasses a variety of musculoskeletal problems, affecting the tissues of the hand, wrist, arm and shoulder. Such problems are relatively common in the general population. Regarding the workplace, WRULD is an umbrella term for conditions thought to be caused by exposure in the workplace. Alternative terms for this are overuse syndrome, repetitive strain injury (RSI) and cumulative trauma disorder (CTD).

As an employer, you have a legal duty to prevent work-related upper limb disorders or to stop any cases getting worse. If you do not manage the risk of upper limb disorders to workers you run the risk of legal action and possible compensation costs.

This procedure will help you undertake a risk assessment that identifies the risks in your workplace and offers some guidance on simple control measures you can put into place.



## H14 – Work-Related Upper Limb Disorders

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### What is this?

This is a written procedure which explains the cause, effect and management of work-related upper limb disorders.

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### The person responsible for implementing this procedure is:

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### What is W.R.U.L.D?

Work-related upper limb disorders (WRULD) can occur in various types of industries where the work undertaken is usually repetitive in nature or involves poor posture. Sufferers are generally employees who use their arms as a main part of their job. Parts of the body that are affected are:

- Neck
  - Back
  - Shoulders
  - Elbows
  - Wrists
  - Hands
  - Fingers.
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### What are the symptoms?

There is a wide range of symptoms which can range from:

- Swelling
  - Cramp
  - Numbness
  - Poor circulation
  - Tingling
  - Weakness
  - Stiffness
  - General aches and pains.
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### What does the responsible manager need to do?

Responsible managers need to:

- Undertake a risk assessment to identify the activities that could potentially result in someone experiencing work related upper limb disorders.



- Involve all persons that undertake these tasks in the formation of the risk assessment.
- Reduce the risk to employees by implementing effective control measures.
- Provide employees with relevant information and training on the cause and prevention of work related upper limb disorders.
- Provide help and support for sufferers who have experienced work related upper limb disorders and, if required, ensure they are helped back to work.
- Monitor and review the arrangements in place for managing work related upper limb disorders.

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## Risk assessment

Types of situations that should be identified, which may result in a person developing work related upper limb disorders, are as follows:

- Repetitive action – using the same muscle over and over again through short quick movements or long slow ones;
- Poor posture – holding something in place for a long period or reaching to extreme positions;
- Excessive force – handling heavy objects or undertaking a physical activity;
- Long working – length of time carrying out an activity;
- Poor working environment – working in cold temperatures, poor lighting, vibration etc.;
- Psychosocial issues – lack of control over speed of work, fear of losing employment, pressure placed on self by self; **and**
- Individual differences – size, shape, height, physical capabilities, age, sex.

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## Reducing the risk of WRULD

When reducing the risk of persons developing work related upper limb disorders, the following should be considered:

### Repetitive action

- Investigate any mechanical alternatives for undertaking the task;
- Introduce small regular rest breaks throughout the day to break up repetitive movements; **and**
- Allow short, frequent pauses for intensive work.

### Poor posture

- Design the equipment and workstation to meet the needs of the individual (ergonomics);
- Provide suitable chairs, footrests, tools with good grip; **and**
- Arrange the workstation layout to suit the needs of the individual.



## Excessive force

- Reduce the weight of items being lifted;
- Minimise the distance over which the loads are carried; **and**
- Provide mechanical lifting aids and the correct tools.

## Long working

- Introduce job rotation to reduce the amount of time spent doing one job;
- Introduce small regular rest breaks throughout the day to break up repetitive movements; **and**
- Allow workers to undertake various steps in the production process.

## Poor working environment

- Provide a reasonable working temperature (airflow, heating);
- Ensure suitable lighting is provided (including personal lamps); **and**
- Install blinds at windows to avoid reflection and glare.

## Psychosocial issues

- Rotate workers to minimise boredom;
- Encourage teamwork and regular communication between workers and management;
- Provide workers with job specific training; **and**
- Involve workers in any decision making concerning their work.

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## Managing cases of WRULDs

All probable cases of work related upper limb disorders must be confirmed through professional medical advice. In cases where it is proven, the responsible manager must ensure that it is reported to the incident reporting centre (see accident reporting procedure) by completion of an F2508A.

**Note:** Consideration should be given to developing a 'back to work' plan for persons who are currently not able to work but who want to come back as soon as their symptoms have cleared.

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## Associated documentation

- Display screen equipment assessment
- Manual handling assessment

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## Legislation

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992
- Display Screen Equipment Regulations 2001

