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Managing Dust Hazards Onsite

HSE inspectors across Great Britain will be targeting construction firms and how they deal with dust hazards on site starting on Monday 5 October 2020.

Inspections will focus on respiratory risks and occupational lung disease; looking at the measures businesses have in place to protect their workers' lungs from the likes of silica, wood dust and other harmful dusts such as asbestos.

Whilst the visits will focus on the management of dust the inspectors will look at all aspects of your management of health and safety including making sure that businesses are doing all they can to protect their workers from the risk of coronavirus and make workplaces COVID-secure. These visits will be unannounced and inspectors can attend your site at any reasonable time. The results can be enforcement notices or even prosecution.

Key hazards on site include

- ▶ Eye contact with dust
- ▶ Skin contact with dust
- ▶ Swallowing dust
- ▶ Breathing dust into the lungs

Health risks

Dust is tiny, dry particles in the air and can be produced when materials are cut, drilled, demolished, sanded, shovelled, etc. This means many work activities can create dust. Dust is not always an obvious health hazard as the particles which cause

the most damage are often invisible to the naked eye and the health effects of exposure can take many years to develop. Types of dust include:

- ▶ Silica dust – created when working on silica containing materials like concrete, mortar and sandstone (also known as respirable crystalline silica or RCS);
- ▶ Wood dust – created when working on softwood, hardwood and wood-based products like MDF and plywood;
- ▶ Other 'general' dust – created when working on other materials containing very little or no silica. The most common include gypsum (eg in plasterboard), limestone, marble and dolomite

Anyone who breathes in these dusts should know the damage they can do to the lungs and airways. The main dust-related diseases affecting construction workers are:

- ▶ Lung cancer;
- ▶ Silicosis
- ▶ Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- ▶ Asthma

You should have in place risk assessments and adequate management controls in place to manage the risks from dusts. Your controls should focus on the following ARC principles:

- ▶ **AVOID** – can the materials be delivered to site cut to the correct size
- ▶ **REDUCE** – use wet cutting methods and ensure that ventilation and extraction are fit for purpose
- ▶ **CONTROL** – manage the remaining risks using PPE and RPE as well as established safe systems of work

HOW CAN SOCOTEC HELP?

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT ALL OPERATIVES, SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS ARE AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF ALL DUSTS AND THAT THEY ARE SUITABLY INFORMED AND TRAINED. HSE WILL WANT TO SEE WHAT MEASURE YOU HAVE IN PLACE FOR THIS. BE PREPARED. FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE CONTACT YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSULTANT OR SOCOTEC ON **01327 811166**