

Vibration at Work

Did you know continuous exposure to vibration can cause long-term painful damage to your hands and fingers – and over time shocks and jolts from driving certain types of vehicles can cause severe back pain?¹

This briefing is intended to inform you of the vibration-related risks that your members could be exposed to in the workplace.

Vibration-related conditions can be split into two broad categories:

- hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS), which results from the use of hand-held power tools; and
- whole-body vibration (WBF), which can be experienced when driving and using mobile machinery.

Hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS)

Who is at risk?

Any member is at risk if they frequently use machines such as:

- concrete breakers, concrete pokers
- sanders, grinders, disc cutters
- hammer drills
- chipping hammers
- chainsaws, brush cutters, hedge trimmers
- powered mowers and
- scabblers or needle guns



Members could be considered to be at a greater level of risk if they use hammer action tools for more than 15 minutes a day and rotary and other “action” tools for more than an hour a day.

What symptoms might an affected member experience?

- tingling and numbness in the fingers (which can cause sleep disturbance)
- lack of dexterity and sensation in their fingers
- loss of strength in their hands (they may be less able to pick up or hold heavy objects)
- in cold and wet condition, fingertips might turn white then red and become painful

If these symptoms are caught early enough, they can disappear with appropriate action. However prolonged exposure once symptoms have set in can lead to gradual worsening and permanence.

¹ www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/index.htm

Which industries covered by Prospect could be considered high risk?

- construction
- estate management (eg maintenance of grounds, parks and water courses)
- forestry
- heavy engineering
- shipbuilding and repair

What steps can members take to protect themselves when using vibrating tools?

- Ask to use suitable low-vibration tools.
- Always use the right tool for each job (to expose you to less hand-arm vibration).
- Check tools before using them to make sure they have been properly maintained and repaired to avoid increased vibration caused by faults or general wear.
- Make sure cutting tools are kept sharp so that they remain efficient.
- Reduce the amount of time you use a tool in one go by doing other jobs in between.
- Avoid gripping or forcing a tool or workpiece more than you have to.
- Store tools so that they do not have very cold handles when next used.
- Encourage good blood circulation by:
 - keeping warm and dry (when necessary wear gloves, a hat, waterproofs and, if available, use heating pads)
 - giving up or cutting down on smoking because smoking reduces blood flow
 - massaging and exercising your fingers during work breaks

I would like to find out more, where should I look?

The Health and Safety Executive has produced a brief guide, *Hand-arm vibration at work*, which is available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg175.pdf.

Additional information is available on the HSE's website at www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/hav/index.htm.

Whole-body vibration (WBF)

Whole-body vibration is transmitted through the seat or feet.

Who is at risk?

Drivers of some mobile machines may be exposed to whole-body vibration and shocks, which are associated with back pain.

These machines include (but are not limited to):

- tractors
- fork lift trucks
- quarrying or earth-moving machinery

Other work factors, such as posture and heavy lifting, are also known to contribute to back problems for drivers, but whole-body vibration experienced as a result of driving can make this worse.

The following groups of members are likely to have an increased risk:

- older people
- young people
- pregnant women
- those with previous back or neck problems



Which Prospect members could be considered high risk?

Anyone that does a lot of occupational driving, but specifically members required to drive or exit the vehicle in cold or wet conditions and drive on rough and uneven surfaces.

How can I get my employer to control the risks?

The following steps can be highly effective in minimising the effects of whole-body vibration:

- Introduce working methods and materials that eliminate or reduce exposure. If this is not possible then replace manned with unmanned machines such as remotely controlled conveyors.
- Choose work equipment of appropriate ergonomic design.
- Consider the choice of seat (including suspension seats) and the choice of tyres.
- Maintain vehicles (including their seats and suspension) and unmade roads and ground conditions.
- Provide suitable and sufficient information and training for employees.
- Limit the duration and magnitude of exposure, ensuring work schedules have adequate rest periods.
- Protect employees from cold and damp.
- Reduce exposure below the exposure limit value (ELV). To gain a better understanding of ELV, visit www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/hav/vibrationcalc.htm.

Where can I find out more?

The HSE provides a wealth of guidance and information about whole-body vibration on its website at www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/wbv.

For more information about specific risks, visit www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/wbv/risks.htm.

The role of the rep

There are a number of positive steps that safety reps can take to raise awareness about, and tackle problems to do with, vibration. This should start with ensuring that the employer has implemented the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005² and consulted safety reps in the process. Any additional control measures that may be required should follow best practice as detailed previously.

As safety reps you are entitled to ask for risk assessments that your employer has conducted to ensure:

- your employer is consulting safety reps
- control measures are being adhered to
- control measures are effective in preventing injuries (possibly by checking ill health/accident reports)

For more on risk assessments please see appendix 1

Additionally, as a safety rep you can monitor your employer's safety policy and systems of work regarding vibration to check that:

- a competent person is responsible for dealing with vibration, and that they obtain expert advice when necessary (from the HSE or a reputable consultant)
- consultation on new working arrangements is conducted in good time ahead of their implementation
- where a potential risk has been identified, employees are given sufficient training/information

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1093/contents/made>

Prospect's Personal Injury scheme

If any members are suffering from the effects of hand-arm or whole-body vibration, they may be able to make a claim under Prospect's Personal Injury scheme.

We have had numerous successful outcomes, including for a member in a shipyard whose role predominantly involved the use of hand-held vibrating tools.

Another successful claim was for a member who made navigation aids using a variety of tools and whose symptoms were worsened by working in cold conditions.

It is vital that affected members bring a claim within three years of the date of knowledge (when they first became aware they had hand-arm vibration syndrome or whole-body vibration).

To make a claim, members can contact our LegalLine on **0808 28 193 28**.

For more information on the Personal Injury scheme email prospectlegal@prospect.org.uk.

If you are experiencing vibration-related issues in your branch and you feel unable to progress these yourself, please contact your negotiations officer in the first instance.

If you have any other queries or questions please email SafetyReps@prospect.org.uk.

Rodney Wheeler

Senior Research Assistant

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Appendix 1: Checklist

Action on vibration – risk assessment

This is based on Regulation 5 of the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005

Safety representatives can check whether their employer is complying with Regulation 5 of the new regulations by asking the following:

In conducting the risk assessment, has the employer assessed daily exposure to vibration by means of:

- ✓ Observation of specific working practices
- ✓ Reference to relevant information on the probable magnitude of the vibration corresponding to the equipment used in the particular working conditions
- ✓ If necessary, measurement of the magnitude of vibration to which their employees are liable to be exposed
- ✓ Whether any employees are likely to be exposed to vibration at or above an exposure action value or above an exposure limit value

Has the risk assessment included a consideration of:

- ✓ The magnitude, type and duration of exposure, including any exposure to intermittent vibration or repeated shocks
- ✓ The effects of exposure to vibration on employees whose health is at particular risk from such exposure
- ✓ Any effects of vibration on the workplace and work equipment including the proper handling of controls, the reading of indicators, the stability of structures and the security of joints
- ✓ Any information provided by the manufacturers of work equipment
- ✓ The availability of replacement equipment designed to reduce exposure to vibration
- ✓ Any extension of exposure at the workplace to whole-body vibration beyond normal working hours, including exposure in rest facilities supervised by the employer
- ✓ Specific working conditions such as low temperatures
- ✓ Appropriate information obtained from health surveillance including, where possible, published information

Is the risk assessment reviewed regularly and revised if:

- ✓ There is reason to suspect that the risk assessment is no longer valid
- ✓ There has been a significant change in the work to which the assessment relates

Has the employer recorded:

- ✓ The significant findings of the risk assessment as soon as is practicable after the risk assessment is made or changed