

Common Woodworking Health and Safety Hazards

Woodworking is a dangerous trade. One quick glance around a carpenter's or joiner's work space reveals a slew of hazards generated by the variety of machines they use and the nature of the work they perform.

Due to the widespread risks and diverse hazards of working as a carpenter or joiner, health and safety training is central to preventing injuries in the workplace. As an employer in the woodworking industry, you have a legal duty to protect, instruct, train and supervise employees to ensure they safely perform their work.

The task of assessing woodworking's numerous hazards and whittling them down to a manageable size can seem daunting. Start by considering the following common woodworking health and safety hazards and recommendations on how to combat them.

Common Health and Safety Hazards

Complying with health and safety standards is a team effort—you must familiarise yourself with industry regulations and common hazards and communicate this information to your workers. The list below is a general overview of common woodworking health and safety hazards and recommendations for curbing them.

- **Hygiene.** Considering the more obvious woodworking hazards, hygiene can seem insignificant by comparison. Make no mistake, hygiene is essential, especially hand hygiene. Hands are the part of the body most likely to encounter harmful substances. Require your employees to frequently wash their hands throughout the day, and prohibit them from cleaning their hands with white spirit, thinners, petrol or turpentine, which can cause a potential

fire hazard. Employees who neglect routinely washing their hands can develop serious skin irritation due to accumulated chemicals.

Woodworking is a dangerous trade with a slew of hazards. Whittle these hazards down to a manageable size by assessing the common risks and recommendations to combat them.

- **Wood dust.** Sanding and planing wood creates dust, and breathing it in can cause nasal cancer and serious lung problems. Invest in a local exhaust ventilation (LEV) system to filter out harmful wood dust in your employees' work space. Dust lamps can help track and control dust dispersion by illuminating extra-fine dust not visible to the naked eye. Protective equipment for the eyes and mouth are crucial.
- **Fire and explosions.** Concentrations of small wood dust particles are highly flammable. They can accumulate in machines, LEVs and in the workroom. Regularly clean the entire workroom, including all machines, to prevent dust build-up. Control any fire hazards, such as wood burning stoves and cigarettes.
- **Woodworking machinery.** Employees must inspect and clean all woodworking machinery regularly. Any employees cleaning machinery must be authorised to do so. Employees should be

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Common Woodworking Health and Safety Risks

authorized to use the machinery and inspect it before each use. Your machines should have the necessary guards and required tools, such as a push stick.

- **Chainsaws.** All employees using chainsaws must be trained to handle them properly. Require employees to wear eye protection, earmuffs, safety helmets, leg protection and protective footwear while using a chainsaw. Before activating the machine, tell employees to scan the work area for any tripping hazards.
- **Hazardous substances.** The woodworking industry is deceptively full of hazardous substances. Inhaling or touching certain substances, such as wood preservatives or epoxy resins, can cause severe dermatitis, a skin condition resulting from direct irritation. Employees should use suitable gloves and body protection when handling hazardous chemicals. Inhaling asbestos can cause irreversible lung damage. Stay vigilant for any asbestos threats.
- **Working at height.** Falling from height can cause serious or even fatal injury. Employees should exercise every precaution when working at height. Commission a risk assessment to identify any risks your employees face. Use edge protection to help stop workers and their materials from falling. Anticipate any fragile roofs by employing crawling boards or roof ladders. Stress proper ladder safety: extend ladders 1 metre above the working platform, tie ladders on both stiles to prevent slipping and maintain three points of contact.
- **Slips and trips.** The danger of slips and trips is that they can happen anywhere and to anyone. Instruct your employees to wear non-slip shoes and clean their work areas periodically throughout the day. Stress that slips and trips affect the whole workplace, so everyone should work to eliminate them by cleaning up spills or debris, even if they did not cause them. Dispose of all debris in a skip, as the debris may contain nails or other sharp objects. Safety boots with steel toe caps can help prevent foot injuries.
- **Noise.** Provide your employees with hearing protection, as noise from loud machines can cause significant hearing loss. Inspect machines for noise, and separate the loudest ones from others.
- **Manual handling.** Woodworking is hard—make it easier on your employees by promoting safe lifting techniques. If a load weighs more than 20 kilograms, employees should make special lifting arrangements. Tell employees to avoid awkward postures or repetitive tasks when lifting.
- **Power and hand tools.** Employees should always check all hand tools and equipment for faults before using them. Verify that employees are using tools correctly and only using what they are trained to use. Maintain up-to-date maintenance reports so you can assess tools' safety.
- **Hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAV).** Prolonged exposure to vibrations from hand-held power tools can damage blood vessels, nerves, muscles and tendons. Curb employee exposure by purchasing low-vibration tools and keeping tools sharp so they remain efficient. Good circulation helps combat HAV, so encourage your employees to keep themselves and their work spaces warm and dry.
- **Electricity.** Your workers should treat all cables as live unless they know otherwise. Electric shock is a major hazard in construction projects. Employees should strive to keep all cables off the ground and never make temporary repairs to cables or tools. Limit extension leads as much as possible.
- **Outdoor exposure.** When working outside, encourage your employees to use sunscreen of at least SPF15. Provide employees with plenty of water and shade for their breaks.

*This list is not exhaustive, but you can manage your risks and hazards with proper planning and adequate insurance. Contact **Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd** for more information on combating woodworking hazards.*