



Toolbox Talks

Spotlight on Safety



Vibrating Tools/Equipment Pose HAVS Risk

Employees who are continuously exposed to high levels of vibration transmitted by vibrating hand tools and equipment are potentially at risk of developing hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS). HAVS affects the nerves, blood vessels, muscles and joints of the hand, wrist and arm. Symptoms include whitening of the fingers, numbness or lack of feeling and tingling (pins and needles), pain, reduced grip strength and a reduction in manual dexterity. Because symptoms that might initially appear to be minor can worsen with prolonged exposure, it is important for managers and safety directors to take note of complaints and change tools and/or work practices.

There are hundreds of different types of tools and equipment that can expose workers to high levels of hand-arm vibration. Some of those commonly used in construction include: chainsaws; jackhammers; hand-held grinders, sanders, cutters; power hammers and chisels; chipping hammers; and reciprocating saws. In some situations it may be necessary to transfer the worker to a job that does not require the use of vibrating tools.

There are, however, some actions an employer can take to reduce or eliminate exposure:

- ▲ Provide good quality tools with anti-vibration features.
- ▲ Require that the employee to use the right tool for the job.
- ▲ Properly maintain tools and ensure that defective tools are repaired or replaced.
- ▲ Keep cutting tools sharp so that they remain efficient.
- ▲ Reduce the amount of time an individual worker has to use a tool by sharing the task among several workers.
- ▲ Advise workers to grip a tool as lightly as possible, while still keeping control of it in compliance with safe work practices
- ▲ Store tools so they do not have cold handles when next used.
- ▲ Provide anti-vibration gloves and encourage workers to keep their hands warm and dry by wearing appropriate gloves.
- ▲ Encourage workers to massage and exercise their fingers during work breaks.
- ▲ Encourage workers who experience HAVS to stop smoking,
- ▲ because symptoms are aggravated by smoking.



Photo by Mark Thomas. (Note that the worker should be wearing safety glasses.)

Finally, train managers, supervisors, foremen and workers to recognize the early signs and symptoms of HAVS, and encourage them to report any occurrences promptly, so that the appropriate actions can be taken to correct the situation.

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