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CREATIVE LIVING

TOOLBOX TALK

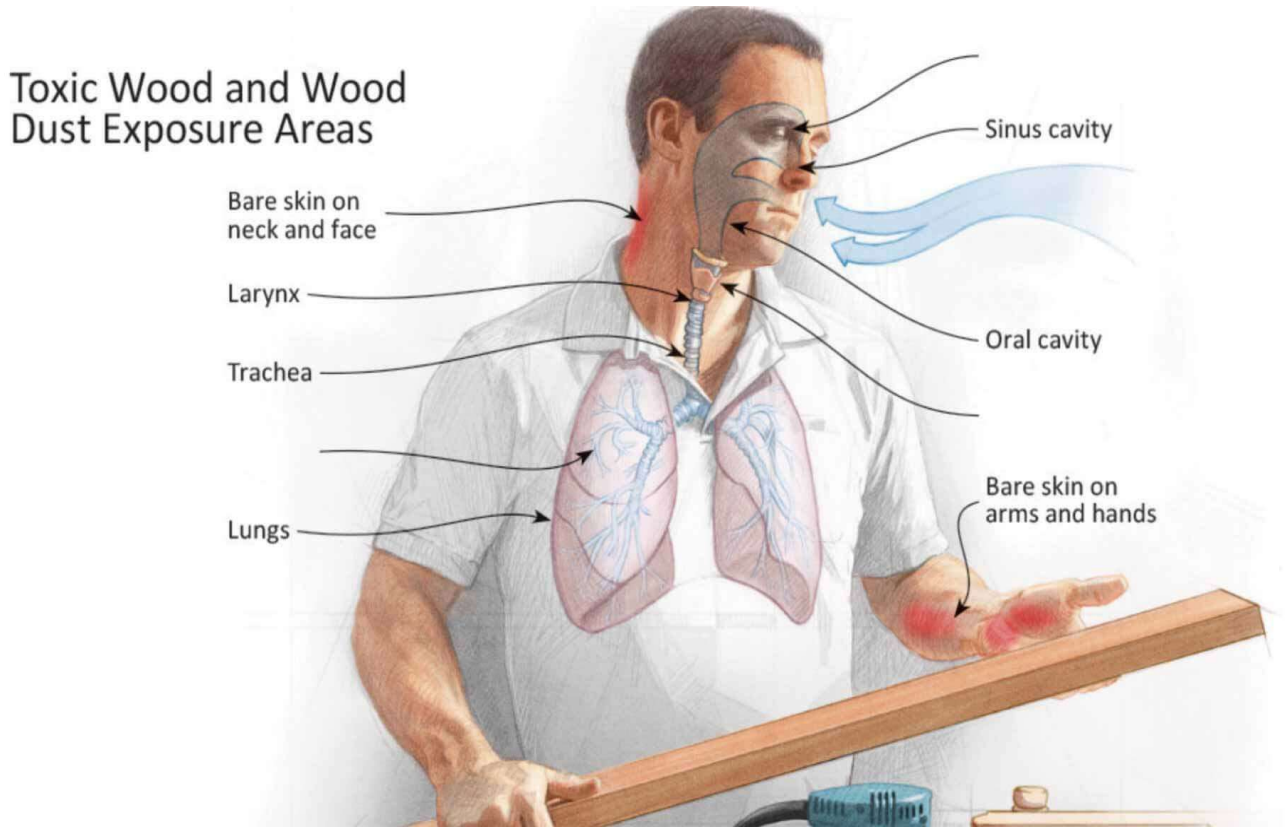
COSHH – Dust

Health risks:

Many construction activities can create airborne dust, especially from materials such as wood, stone, concrete, fillers and plasterboards. The widespread use of portable power tools has resulted in an increase in the health risks from dust in construction. The tasks themselves may be brief but multiple short exposures can still result in ill health. Dust is not always an obvious hazard because the particles that do the most damage are not visible to the human eye and the health effects can take years to develop.

All wood dust is a substance hazardous to health because it can cause serious non-reversible health problems such as: Asthma, Dermatitis, and Irritation to the eyes, nose and throat. The long term effects of exposure to dust can be permanent and create disabling damage to the lungs and severely affect quality of life.

Carpenters and joiners are four times more likely to get asthma compared with other UK workers. Settled dust contains the fine particles that are most likely to damage the lungs, which can lead to cancer. This means the controls need to be effective and wood dust exposures need to be controlled to levels as low as is reasonably practicable.



Health monitoring:

You must decide if you need a health surveillance programme. Wood dust causes asthma and any health effects must be picked up early. For most woods, low level health surveillance will do. This could be an initial questionnaire or conversations with your Regional Installation Manager.

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Dust extraction:

Cutting, planing or sanding wood with power tools can produce significant levels of wood dust. These levels can be very high in some circumstances. Anyone breathing in the dust cloud will be affected. Those doing the work are particularly at risk.

It is therefore important to use on-tool dust extraction. **Our RAMS state that a minimum of L-class dust extraction is used for the cutting of chipboard materials, however sites are now enforcing M-class dust extraction. It is therefore important that the switch is made to M-class dust extraction as soon as possible.** Connections should be tight fitting and secure without obvious leaks. A dust bag is not sufficient. Make sure you have good ventilation in the area of work.

Maintenance:

Regularly look for signs of damage to the extraction hoses or main unit itself paying particular attention to filters, extraction rates and audible and visual warning notifications. Someone competent should examine any dust extraction equipment thoroughly and test its performance regularly. Ensure there are no blockages and that suction is good and that the machine is emptied regularly and filters cleaned and then replaced in line with the manufacturers guidance.

Housekeeping:

Never sweep up or use the blower function on the dust extractor as this will disturb the dust and allow it to become airborne and inhaled. Always clean up using the dust extractor that at least meets the L-class filtration classification. Cleaning up the work area will also help prevent slips, trips and falls caused by settled dust on the floor surface.

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Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE):

RPE must be used when cutting wood, which like dust extraction is a mandatory requirement. RPE with a minimum assigned protection factor of FFP3, will be required for all cutting and some drilling operations.

All RPE must be face-fit tested to a clean shaven face to ensure the mask fits tightly. Face-fit testing should be undertaken every two years. The RPE must be stored safely and changed regularly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Manufacturers/suppliers of RPE should provide guidance on how best to maintain their RPE. Disposable respirators should be discarded after each days use, where applicable, or more frequently if they become damaged, visibly contaminated, harder to breathe through or their shelf-life expiry date has passed. For re-usable (sometimes called non-disposable) RPE, always follow the manufacturer's instructions on the replacement of filters, and on cleaning and disinfection. Rubber respirators can usually be cleaned with soap and warm water, and then dried thoroughly after use. Re-usable RPE also needs to undergo thorough maintenance, examination and testing at least once a month when used regularly, or at least every three months if only used occasionally.

Summary:

- **Competence is key – it's skills, knowledge and behaviour**
- **Don't let dust get airborne**
- **The smallest dust particles are the most dangerous**
- **Dust is deadly and must be prevented and controlled**
- **Use the correct dust extraction and face-fit mask that is properly fitted and maintained**