

## **HAND ARM VIBRATION & POSSIBLE HEALTH EFFECTS**

Constant exposure to vibrating equipment can cause a range of symptoms. If the vibration of the equipment is not controlled appropriately, or the operative is not instructed on the amount of time they are allowed to use the equipment and the type of protection they can wear, these symptoms may become quite significant and can result in permanent injury to the hands, arms, shoulders and neck. This condition, which progresses from intermittent symptoms which settle after using the equipment, to symptoms that persist after using the equipment and then settle and finally produces permanent symptoms, is known as Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome.

The symptoms that can occur include:-

- Pins and needles;
- Numbness;
- Aching of the joints;
- Pain in the joints, particularly of the fingers and hand;
- Loss of power and grip in the hand, wrist and forearm;
- Associated medical conditions such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome also includes the condition known as Vibration White Finger. When individuals are exposed to cold or wet environments they develop pins and needles, numbness, pain, stiffness and loss of power in the fingers, hand and wrist. These symptoms usually begin as very mild intermittent symptoms. The hands and fingers often become white when they are cold or wet. The whiteness then progresses to a red violet colour, similar to chilblains, and the hands become very painful. The vibrating equipment may damage the blood vessels in the hand, the nerves, the muscles, the bones and the joints of the hand, wrist and upper limbs.

If you develop any of the symptoms described above you must discuss this with your Manager immediately. Your Manager will then assess the suitability of you continuing to work with vibrating equipment or to work in certain cold and wet environments. It is also important that you review your leisure and home activities. This may include sporting activities, gardening, using vibrating equipment as part of your DIY activities and other hobbies you may have outside of work.

It is your employer's responsibility to review your work, the type of equipment you are using, the time and pattern in which you use this equipment, the environment in which you work and the potential for this to be modified or controlled.

## What can you do to avoid symptoms of Vibration White Finger or Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome?

- It is important that you do not smoke, or at least cut down, particularly before and while you are working with vibrating equipment.
- It is important, if you are working outside, to keep warm and dry.
- Ensure you have the right tool for the job – Discuss this with your Manager if you have concerns. It is important that you do not have to exert significant additional force on that tool, which may involve gripping the tool strongly and therefore reducing the blood supply to your hand.
- Do not use any vibrating equipment for long periods of time without a break.
- It is important that your equipment is kept in good working order, that it is serviced and repaired regularly.
- It is important that you wear the appropriate protective clothing that you have been issued with and that you store and maintain this properly.
- It is important that you take part in any health and safety training and you are fully aware of the risks of the equipment you are using.
- **It is important that you do not ignore any symptoms, that you discuss them with your Manager or Supervisor immediately.**

