

IN BRIEF

IOSH safety packs

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health has said it is well on the way to its target of having its information pack on respirable crystalline silica in workplaces downloaded 25,000 times by October. By May, it had recorded more than 20,000 downloads. The pack is part of its "No Time to Lose" campaign to tackle work-related cancer.

Post-Brexit protection

The TUC has published a new briefing, "Protecting health and safety after Brexit", to highlight to trade unionists and working people that health and safety protections are, it has argued, at risk from the current Brexit plans. Although the Government has set out its intention in a White Paper to transfer all existing health and safety protections from EU law to UK law, there are no guarantees for what happens afterwards, the union body warned.

Viking disease

A website has been launched to raise awareness of Dupuytren's disease, also often known as Viking disease, as it is thought to have been brought to the UK by the Vikings. The site, www.thisisdupuytren.com, has been set up by healthcare company Sobi. The condition makes fingers bend inwards towards the palm so that they cannot be straightened, making everyday tasks challenging for sufferers.

**Sunburn awareness**

More than one-third (35%) of Britons have been sunburned in the past year while in the UK and, of those, 28% were burned three or more times, according to a survey by the British Association of Dermatologists. The poll, to mark the association's Sun Awareness Week in May, added that the high rate of sunburn was despite the fact 88% said they were aware of sun awareness messages.

Hand dryers could cause long-term damage to hearing

By Nic Paton

High-powered electric hand dryers in public toilets can be as loud as pneumatic drills and could cause lasting damage to vulnerable people's hearing, a hearing aid company has warned.

The study by Audiologist.co.uk has concluded that newer, more powerful dryers can be exceptionally loud, especially in the enclosed space of a public convenience, and can therefore pose an even greater health risk.

The company said that anyone who is worried about their hearing should be advised to consider drying their hands with a towel.

"You're standing for up to a minute in front of a machine that is making as much noise as a construction worker drilling a hole in the road," said Jonathan Ratcliffe, spokesman for Audiologist.co.uk.

"The only difference between him and you is that he's been issued with ear defenders," he added.

While periodic exposure to loud hand dryers may have little effect on healthy people, those with compromised hearing, the very young and the elderly could be at risk.



DRYING OUT LOUD... noise emitted from hand dryers should be considered.

The company has estimated that pneumatic drills come in at 90dB and more, as do some models of electric hand dryer in public toilets.

By comparison, normal conversation is 60dB and the generally accepted maximum safe sound level is 85dB. However, a decibel scale is logarithmic not linear, which means every 10dB increase doubles the sound level, meaning a hand dryer is eight times louder than normal conversation. The risk from hand dryers can also be increased by their location.

"Most toilets are small, enclosed spaces that are all tiles, stainless steel and mirrors. That means any

sound is likely to be amplified, and the pressure on the ear drums increased," said Ratcliffe.

In a busy toilet area, such as a railway station or motorway service area, multiple blowers could be running continuously, increasing hearing risks further, he added.

This meant employers should factor in the hearing risk to attendants and cleaners as much as they would for other health factors.

"The cumulative effect of working in an enclosed space with noisy machinery is well documented, and it applies as much to toilet attendants as it does factory workers," said Ratcliffe.

Lung disease campaign targets manufacturing

The British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) has launched a new phase of its occupational lung disease awareness campaign "Breathe Freely", this time targeting the manufacturing sector.

The campaign is being run in partnership with the manufacturers' organisation EEF, union body the TUC, and manufacturers including TWI, JCB, Toyota and BAE Systems.

The campaign will run alongside BOHS' existing campaign for the construction industry.

The latest iteration was launched in May, with the aim of raising awareness of respiratory health

hazards, which BOHS has said caused about 90% of the estimated 13,000 deaths in Britain each year from work-related diseases across all sectors.

Within the manufacturing sector specifically, it is estimated that, annually, about 4,000 workers suffer from breathing and lung problems they believed were caused or made worse by their work.

Furthermore, the sector's welders have been identified as a group at particular risk of serious lung conditions from inhaling hazardous fumes, gases and dusts, meaning the new campaign will focus primarily

on improving respiratory health protection for those workers.

BOHS president Karen Bufton said: "The good news is there's a solution – all of these cases of ill health caused by welding are preventable. Welders can be protected from the hazardous fumes and gases by recognising the hazards, evaluating the risks and controlling exposures. This is, quite simply, good occupational hygiene practice."

A range of "Breathe Freely" resources specifically for those in the manufacturing sector can be accessed through the BOHS's breathefreely.org.uk website.

UK firms paid over £61 million in fines in 2016

UK-based companies were forced to pay out more than £61 million in health and safety fines throughout 2016 – almost two-and-a-half times more than what was levied in 2015, according to an analysis by law firm BLM.

There were a total of 292 incidents recorded during 2016, with an average payout of almost £250,000. This

was four times the £69,500 average cost seen the previous year, where 358 cases were brought.

The increase followed a change in legislation made in February 2016, when new guidelines were imposed for health and safety, food hygiene and corporate manslaughter offences meaning courts now consider the culpability, seriousness

and likelihood of harm, as well as the size of a business and its turnover when imposing fines, said BLM.

Another reason for the 2016 figures being so high was the fact that 18 £1 million-plus fines were issued, compared with just two in 2015.

The highest profile of these was the £5 million fine issued to Alton Towers following the Smiler accident.