

Brown & Carroll Wood dust control

Building the business case for prevention

The respiratory health risks from breathing in wood dust when cutting timber (and in particular MDF) products is well understood by Brown & Carroll, which is why the company has long enforced a policy that requires automatic dust extraction systems be fitted to all wood cutting machines on their sites. However, small quantities of visible dust in the air and on the surfaces around the cutting stations were reported, from which it was clear that the risk of exposure to the potentially harmful airborne wood dust particles was not being effectively controlled. The subsequent change to their control procedures has led not just to reduced health risks for operatives during mechanical cutting operations, but also lower costs, better employee relations, and added commercial value.



Maintenance

A regulated maintenance programme is in place. It is now standard Brown & Carroll procedure that the vacuum filters are cleaned daily. Operatives know who is responsible for maintenance, should a filter need replacing, and they are confident that the vacuum controls are regularly checked.

RPE face fit testing

All those undertaking cutting works must now wear an FFP disposable dust mask, as a secondary precaution. This new policy also requires that all operatives are face fit tested to ensure that these dust masks are worn in the correct manner and are comfortable. A good face fit is vital to effectiveness of tight-fitting respirators otherwise contaminants in the air could still be breathed in, and if a mask is uncomfortable it might be loosened, again risking exposure. It is also important that the worker performs a fit check of the RPE before each use. For reusable masks this can be done by placing a hand over the filter or inlet valve(s) and breathing in. If there is a good seal, the user will experience the mask sucking in toward their face. If there is a poor seal, the facepiece should be readjusted and the seal checked again.

Monitoring

Weekly site inspections monitor compliance with the control procedures that have been put in place.

Health benefits

Financial

- Reduced training costs, through in-house trainers, as there can be up to five new employees a week on each of the company's projects who would be much more expensive to have trained through an external contractor

Employee relations

- Employees have taken ownership of the exposure controls, and are appreciative of the fact that the company is taking their occupational health seriously and has put in place the control and compliance measures to improve this

Reputation

- Positive feedback from clients and Principal Contractor due to:
 - Demonstrable occupational health focus, through an effective exposure control programme
 - In-house training competence and operative compliance