

GMB: HEALTH & SAFETY IN MANUFACTURING

Introduction

Although manufacturing may be in decline across the UK it does still continue to employ large numbers of workers in some industries. As a general trade union GMB represents workers in many manufacturing sectors including, Food, Drink, Textiles, Engineering, Chemicals, Rubber, Plastics & Glass production. While each sector will have its own particular issues there are some that are common to all areas of manufacturing.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are often misunderstood and over complicated. In essence the process should identify any hazards in the workplace and then take account of measures to either eliminate the hazard or, more likely, reduce the effects of exposure from the hazard on the workforce. GMB safety reps should be involved in the risk assessment but it is a managerial responsibility in law to carry out a risk assessment. The person responsible for carrying out the risk assessment should be competent to do so.

Noise

Modern machinery, in general, is much less noisy than machines used in the past. However some machinery still in use can be old or badly maintained and generate noise levels that can be harmful to hearing. Noise induced hearing tends to take place over a period of time and combined with the natural ageing process is irreversible. In law there are two action levels on noise where an employer must act. Firstly when the noise level reaches 80 decibels (DB) where the risk needs to be assessed and then information and training given to the workforce. The second level is at 85 DB where adequate ear protection will need to be issued to all who are near the source of the noise. It is also possible to have other solutions which help reduce the noise levels, including redesigning the machine, building barriers to absorb the noise or restricting the number of workers exposed to higher noise levels.

Manual Handling

Manual handling will almost certainly play a large part of any manufacturing activity. Manual handling is not just about carrying materials but also needs to take account of the weight, size and shape of the objects being carried as well as the distance to be covered, the surface stability and the capacity of the person doing the task. Manual handling also includes small repetitive movements, twisting, pushing and pulling. Many manual handling problems can be overcome by using aids such as trolleys, barrows or lifting equipment to shift heavy loads. In some situations two people might be needed to lift together and all manual handling should involve training in the proper techniques to be used.

REMEMBER YOU ARE SAFER IN THE GMB

Electrical Safety

Electrical safety should not be overlooked as electrical faults can lead to fire or death. Electric shocks as low as 50 volts can impact on worker's health when operating machinery as even mild shocks can lead to loss of muscle control and could lead to a serious accident involving moving machinery parts.

Chemicals & Dust

Many manufacturing processes involve using chemicals which can be an important part of production or for cleaning. Workers are entitled to know which chemicals they have been exposed to, any danger levels and protective measures from the chemical data sheet which should be supplied by the manufacturer. In working with wood, textiles, metals and flour dust in the workplace can be an explosive/fire hazard and a respiratory problem. If dust generation cannot be suppressed at source management should install Local Exhaust Ventilation, which should be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The use of PPE should be identified as part of the risk assessment and is used to minimise the risk of injury and disease. In theory PPE should only be used as a last resort when all other control measures have been considered. The reality in many cases is that PPE is a necessary part of many GMB members working environment. PPE should be supplied **FREE** of charge and cleaned and replaced on a regular basis.

Workplace Management & the Workplace Environment

The way any workplace is laid out in terms of storage and cleanliness is important in avoiding collisions and slips and trips. The layout of workshops and stores should be evaluated on a regular basis as orders and equipment can change. Cleaning and maintenance are very important in manufacturing and should not be ignored but covered regularly.

GMB Safety Representatives

GMB members often find it difficult in raising health, safety and welfare issues of concern with their managers and supervisors. GMB safety reps have the legal right to represent you on a wide range of issues including toilet provision, clean accessible water, heating and ventilation. In addition they have the right to investigate accidents, inspect the workplace and to be consulted on any proposed health and safety changes in your workplace. Two GMB safety reps can request the setting up of a workplace health & safety committee where issues of concern in the workplace can be discussed with senior management.

REMEMBER YOU ARE SAFER IN GMB

IF YOU ARE NOT A GMB MEMBER WE CAN HELP YOU!