

Abstract

WOOD DUST REGULATION AND PREVENTION – A TRADE UNION PERSPECTIVE

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The scientific evaluation on wood dust indicates, that wood dust exposure provides risks for cancer, allergic and non-allergic dermal and airway responses, irritation etc.

According to the Carcinogen Directive (1999/38 amending 90/394 Directive) workers must be effectively protected from the risks of developing cancer as a result of occupational exposure to hardwood dusts.

Currently, the limit value is of great interest. The present European wood dust limit value (5 mg/m^3) is a technical value not based on scientific evidence. A Dutch recommendation ($0,2 \text{ mg/m}^3$) shows a kind of long perspective. And SCOEL seems to point at $0,5 \text{ mg/m}^3$. Now we are waiting for the Commission's proposal.

For the employers the established limit value of 5 mg/m^3 seems to be adequate: The employers of CEI-Bois have asked their national affiliates to request the national authorities to instruct SCOEL to withdraw its proposal for reducing the demand on wood dust in the working atmosphere to $0,5 \text{ mg/m}^3$ and to keep the demand on 5 mg/m^3 , according to Nytt fra RAMIT, 1-2003.

In a trade union perspective any doubts of health effects should lead to regulation in favour of the workers (principle of precaution). For this reason, the limit value of wood dust shall be $0,5 \text{ mg/m}^3$. This is reasonable according to scientific evidence on health effects, the technical measures of prevention and the actual levels of exposure.

Prevention starts by conducting a risk assessment focusing on any risk of wood dust in the work place; including the hazardous properties; the level, type and duration of exposure; the effect of preventive measures taken or to be taken etc. This is European law.

In fact, it is possible to reduce the exposure to all most zero.

Swedish example, late 1990es:

Goal for not exceeding $0,3 \text{ mg/m}^3$ was reached. The important factors for success were the commitment from personnel, support from management and the trade union and competent technical advice.

Lesson learned from the Swedish case: Reducing wood dust provides added value, better work environment, reducing cleaning time, better quality and more effective and profitable production.

Summing up: Worker participation is the determinant of successful occupational health and safety management and a major contributing factor in the reduction of occupational diseases and injuries - Also with respect to wood dust.