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Immunisation against pneumonia

Unite's view is as follows:

- Prevention first: employers should review their current arrangements to ensure that all possible controls and preventive measures are in place to protect welders and other workers exposed to welding fumes. Unite safety reps are encouraged to raise this issue and work with their employers to ensure that this happens.
- Immunisations: employers must put in place provision for immunisation to be offered to all their employees who may be at risk. This immunisation should be offered on a voluntary basis, be **provided free of charge and given in accordance with medical advice. Vaccinations can never be an alternative to good controls.**
- **Unite members who are concerned about the possible health effects of the vaccination or who wish to seek medical advice about it should first contact their GP**

More information on welding which includes several specific guidance leaflets is on the HSE website.

http://www.hse.gov.uk/welding/
http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/eis44.htm

Task specific COSHH guidance for welding, cutting and allied jobs
http://www.hse.gov.uk/welding/guidance/index.htm

Working Safely with Acetylene, HSE Guidance
http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg327.pdf

Unite website
http://bit.ly/1uWia5Y

Bad Air Day website
http://www.badairday.info/home.asp

HSE Manufacturing Workplan 2015-16
http://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/og/og-00067.htm?ebul=gd-engineering&cr=2/Jul15

HSE Manufacturing Workplan – Appendix 4 Welding Fume
http://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/og/og-00067-appendix-4.pdf

www.unitetheunion.org
www.badairday.info

6753/DP/7-15

WELDING FUMES CAN KILL

Looking for Trouble on Health & Safety

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This guidance will concentrate on reducing the risks of breathing in toxic fumes during welding work.

Welding of all types presents a range of problems. Of particular concern to Unite are the problems created by breathing in welding fumes. It is clear that the fumes from welding can cause long term health problems, especially lung problems such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) and pneumonia. It has long been recognised that welders often suffer from flu-like symptoms.

Main welding hazards

- Using the wrong equipment for the job.
- Fire caused by heat, sparks, molten metal or direct contact with the flame.
- Explosion when carrying out hot work on or near containers or pipework that contain or may have contained flammable materials.
- Fire and explosion caused by gas leaks, backfires and flashbacks.
- Fires caused by the ignition of flammable materials on or near buses such as upholstery, carpets, trim, petrol in tanks, discarded rags and tissues, fuel lines and nearby containers – often started by sparks or drips of molten metal.
- Burns from contact with the flame or hot metal.
- The storage of gas bottles – especially in the event of a fire.
- Crushing or impact injuries when handling or transporting cylinders.
- Noise – harmful levels are generated by electric arc welding (except TIG).
- Vibration white finger.
- Fumes and gases created during hot work including those from primer and paint layers and other substances such as underseal and galvanised coatings.

Many of these hazards may be difficult to avoid or prevent when working in enclosed places, so it is essential that safety reps are involved in discussions on welding safety to assist in prevention. Encouraging good housekeeping, for example clearing up discarded rags etc, and cleaning off oil contaminants are essential before welding can start.

Welding fume – reduce the risk

Welders can become ill from breathing in welding fume. This may be temporary illness or long term permanent illness such as asthma. These illnesses include pneumonia, occupational asthma, cancer, metal fume fever, irritation of throat and lungs and temporary reduced lung function.

It is essential, therefore, that employers put in place measures to prevent or control the risk of injury from welding.

Controlling fumes and gases

Employers must use local exhaust ventilation where possible, and always where welding work is being done in confined locations.

Mobile extraction units with flexible exhaust hoods and trunking can remove fumes and gases from most locations. Local exhaust ventilation should be examined and tested by a competent person at least every 14 months. Where no extraction is available there must be a free flow of air to disperse fumes.

Highest fume

- Arc gouging
- Flux core
- MMA
- MAG
- Flame cutting
- MIG
- Plasma cutting
- TIG
- Resistance welding
- Laser cutting
- Submerged arc

Lowest fume

Masks

Where it is not possible to provide Local Exhaust Ventilation, masks designed to protect against welding fume may be appropriate.

All work clothing for welders must be appropriate and cover arms and legs. Suitable gloves must be provided and used. Eye protection must be provided to the EN standard 175:1997 (which covers PPE for eyes and face during welding and allied processes). Exposure to direct and reflected ultraviolet light and infrared rays must be prevented by wearing protective clothing and using welding screens.

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH Regs)

The COSHH Regs set out the law on how to control hazardous substances at work, so they do not cause ill health.

COSHH is the law that requires employers to control substances that are hazardous to health. Employers can prevent or reduce workers exposure to hazardous substances by:

- Finding out what the health hazards are;
  - deciding how to prevent harm to health (risk assessment);
  - providing control measures to reduce harm to health;
  - making sure they are used;
  - keeping all control measures in good working order;
  - providing information, instruction and training for employees and others;
  - providing monitoring and health surveillance in appropriate cases;
  - planning for emergencies.

All of these things apply to welders and welding. Employers who fail to meet the COSHH Regs are breaking the law.

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