

# Supervisor Safety Alert

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## Keep your cool about how to handle heat stress

Maintaining a safe work environment may be more challenging than you think, especially if your employees are being exposed to hot temperatures. As we get into the hot summer months in most parts of the country, it is important for supervisors to ensure employees know how to prevent heat stress, how to recognize warning signs/symptoms, and what to do if there is a problem.

The following quick reference, provided by OSHA, can be shared with employees, either in a handout or toolbox talk.

### Factors leading to heat stress

- High temperature and humidity
- Direct sun or heat
- Limited air movement
- Physical exertion
- Poor physical condition
- Some medicines
- Inadequate tolerance for hot workplaces

### Symptoms

Heat exhaustion:

- Headaches, dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting
- Weakness and moist skin
- Mood changes such as irritability or confusion
- Upset stomach or vomiting

Heat stroke:

- Dry, hot skin with no sweating
- Mental confusion or losing consciousness
- Seizures or convulsions

### Preventing heat stress

- Know signs/symptoms of heat-related illnesses; monitor yourself and coworkers
- Block out direct sun or other heat sources
- Use cooling fans/air-conditioning; rest regularly
- Drink lots of water; about 1 cup every 15 minutes



- Wear lightweight, light colored, loose-fitting clothes
- Avoid alcohol, caffeinated drinks, or heavy meals

### What to do for heat-related illness

Call 911 (or local emergency number) immediately. While waiting for help to arrive:

- Move the worker to a cool, shaded area
- Loosen or remove heavy clothing
- Provide cool drinking water
- Fan and mist the person with water

# Steel-toe or composite-toe: The differences are slight

If your employees are required to wear impact foot protection, you may be asked by your employees which type of toe – steel or composite – should they wear.

The answer is: It's a matter of preference.

Both composite and steel-toe footwear must be ASTM- or ANSI- approved, but the testing procedures are the same for both types. In other words, the

protection afforded should be the same for steel-toe and composite footwear.

Beyond preference, foot protection should fit well. Employees should make sure that it:

- Provides ankle support,
- Fits snugly around the heel and ankle when laced, and
- Allows ample toe room.

Also, foot protection should be inspected before use and kept in good condition to ensure effective protection at all times.



# Are your employees trained to use pallet jacks too?

It's easy to think of powered pallet jacks in a different light than that of forklifts. But, when it comes to training, the OSHA requirements are the same for both types of equipment. All powered pallet jack operators must be trained prior to operating the equipment in the workplace.

## Training

Just like forklifts, all operators must receive a combination of:

- Formal instruction,
- Practical training, and
- A performance evaluation.

The training must teach operators on the equipment-specific and

workplace-specific topics they need to operate the equipment safely. For example, if operators will be operating on ramps, then this must be covered in the training.

Once initial training has been given, OSHA also requires that pallet jack operators be evaluated to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to safely operate the equipment. The evaluation must be conducted at the time of initial training and then at least every three years thereafter. OSHA requires that the evaluation must be more than just a written or verbal test. The employer must actually observe the operator in action performing all typical operations.

Once an operator has been trained and evaluated, the employer must keep a certification of that training. While not required by OSHA, many employers also issue a wallet card or license to the operator, in addition to keeping the certification in the employee's training file.



# Shake and ache: How to prevent hand-arm vibration injuries in your workplace

If the work you supervise requires jackhammers, jack leg drills, grinders, chipping hammers, or other vibrating tools, then you're well aware of the problem of protecting workers from dust, flying debris, and noise. But have you thought about how the vibration from those tools may affect workers? Hand-arm vibration disorders are a real risk for employees who work with vibrating tools – and they're on the rise. You can take action now to minimize the risk of vibration-related injuries.

Although OSHA doesn't address workplace vibration exposure directly, vibration injuries are covered by the OSHA's General Duty Clause. The General Duty Clause requires employers to protect employees from recognized hazards in the workplace, even if a specific regulation doesn't apply. Also, 26 states run their own health and safety programs that are at least as protective as the federal program.

## What are hand-arm vibration injuries?

Hand-arm vibration injuries are part of a larger classification of work-related repetitive injuries called musculoskeletal disorders. These disorders are caused by wear and tear on muscles, joints, nerves, and bones. Vibration-related injuries to the hand and arm occur when blood vessels are constricted or ruptured from the use of vibrating hand tools.

## Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)

HAVS is a general description covering many repetitive injuries

to the upper extremities caused by exposure to vibrating hand tools. HAVS includes symptoms such as muscles fatigue and weakness, pain in the wrists, arms, or shoulders, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, and Reynaud's Syndrome. Other problems that may be associated with HAVS include problems sleeping, forgetfulness, irritability, headaches, and depression.

## Preventing HAVS

The best method of treating vibration injuries is to prevent them from happening in the first place. What can supervisors do to keep their employees safe?

**Automate.** Look for ways to replace manual work with mechanized work. Instead of using a chipping hammer, for instance, use automated grinding and manipulators.

**Reduce vibration.** Look for tools with vibration isolators and vibration dampeners. OSHA recommends vibration-reducing handles on all vibrating tools. Rest the tool against a support as much as possible.

**Require the use of anti-vibration gloves.** This type of glove reduces the frequency and intensity of

vibration transmitted from hand tools. Talk with your safety manager or PPE supplier on the types of gloves that might be suited for your operations.

**Offer frequent breaks.** Workers should not use vibrating hand tools for long periods of time. Allow employees to take 10 to 15 minute breaks from vibrating tools every hour. Rotate tasks so workers can alternate between vibrating and non-vibrating tools.

**Maintain tools in good working order.** Vibration is greater when machine parts are unbalanced or poorly maintained.

**Inform workers.** Discuss the hazards of working with vibrating tools and train them in the proper use of those tools.

**Train employees to recognize signs of HAVS.** The earlier a repetitive injury is treated, the less likely it is to cause permanent damage.

**Remind workers to let the tool do the work.** Gripping tool handles too tightly can lead to injury.

**Emphasize good hygiene.** Workers should strive to keep their hands warm and dry.

## The shakedown

Recognizing and preventing hand-arm vibration injuries in the workplace does take significant time and effort on the part of employers and supervisors. But your efforts will save you time and money in the long run, preventing the loss of work time; the cost of medical treatment; and the life-long consequences of vibration-related hand and arm injuries.





# Clear the way for a safe emergency exit

When you hear a fire alarm, your first impulse is to head toward the exit you normally use during fire drills. But, what will you do if this exit is blocked because of the fire? And, will you know where to go if you happen to be in another part of the building when the alarm sounds? If you don't, neither will your employees.

## Exit route basics

An "exit route" is a clear path of exit travel from any point in a workplace to a place of safety. An exit route consists of three parts: the exit access, the exit, and the exit discharge. The exit route can include aisles, stairs, ramps, etc. A workplace typically must have at least two exit routes that are remote from each other. If a fire or other emergency blocks access to one

### *Did you know?*

Revolving, sliding, and overhead doors are prohibited from serving as exit doors. OSHA requires under 1910.36(e) that a side-hinged door be used to connect any room to an exit route. No other type of door is acceptable under the standard.

exit route, the other exit route can be used.

## Take a tour

A big part of an emergency evacuation drill is finding out how quickly everyone can safely follow the evacuation procedures. When you have a few minutes, spend some time taking a close look at the exit routes in your area.

At each point along the way, you must be able to clearly see the "Exit" signs and see that the exit route:

- Has adequate width and height,
- Does not get narrower at any point along the direction of exit travel,
- Uses side-hinged doors,
- Has doors that swing in the direction of exit travel from rooms that may be occupied by more than 50 people,
- Uses self-closing fire doors at the exits,
- Has doors that are free of decorations or other signs that would interfere with identifying them as part of the exit route,
- Is free of obstructions,
- Has adequate lighting,
- Does not lead toward hazards,
- Is marked with the direction of travel along the way,
- Has doors that are easy to open without having to use keys or tools,
- Leads to the outside or a safe place of refuge, and
- Has enough space for people beyond the exit.



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