

Guidelines for Safe Use of Sawn Timber

This sheet has been provided as a guideline for the safe use of sawn timber and does not replace the need for risk assessment to identify and reduce risks associated with handling and re-working sawn timber.

Hazards

Softwood sawdust, which may be generated through activities such as planing, cross cutting etc., has been assigned a Maximum Exposure Limit (MEL) of 5mg/m³ (8-hour time weighted average) under the COSHH Regulations. Therefore exposure to wood dust should be reduced as far as reasonably practicable.

Ensure that the exposure to dust is being adequately controlled in your workplace, where necessary carry out dust sampling. Use a process or method of work that reduces the generation of wood dust to a minimum, providing dust control equipment such as Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV) where necessary to reduce the dust entering the workplace atmosphere. Where measures taken to reduce exposure to airborne dust are inappropriate and/ or insufficient, then in addition respiratory protective equipment must be provided and used. Good housekeeping is essential to reduce the risk of slip, trips and falls and also reduce the risk of fire.

Other measures to reduce the hazards from sawn timber:

- When removing & handling metal banding, eye protection, protective gloves and safety cutters should be used.
- Ensure that all stacks of packed timber are positioned on firm level ground and supported by substantial bearers. Stacks should be built of timber of similar length, longer lengths should not overhang those below them. No loose material should be placed on top of stacks. Stacks should be placed to minimise the effect of the prevailing wind. Do not climb on stacks of timber.
- Extreme caution should be taken when unstacking unstable packs or packs with broken bands. Do not unstack packs above ground level.

Treated Timber – Handling Precautions

As the treatment process fixes the chemical into the cells of the timber, there will be no leaching of chemical should the timber become wet. Therefore, no special precautions are necessary and no dangers to health exist when handling treated timber that is in a dry condition after treatment. Cuts and abrasions should in any event be protected by a waterproof dressing and personal hygiene should predominate as a matter of routine.

However, in the event that small quantities of wood preservative solution are found, it is recommended that synthetic rubber gloves are used for handling and that clothing is laundered after use. Any splashes into the eyes must be washed immediately and seek medical advice. Any contact with the skin should be rinsed immediately with clean water.

No special precautions are necessary when carrying out cross cutting, notching or boring after treatment with normal hand operated tools. When using high speed cross cut saws or mechanical sanders, normal precautions to prevent exposure to wood dust as described above should be taken.

Treated Timber – Disposal

Do not use for fuel on barbecues, cooking stoves or grates. Do not use for animal litter or bedding.

Treated timber must be disposed of as controlled waste. It is not classified as hazardous waste. Contact your local authority to find out about the appropriate arrangements in your area.

Further Reading

This sheet is designed as a guideline only and full precautions should be taken after risk assessment, the following are recommended as further reading:-

- Wood Dust: hazards and precautions - HSE Information Sheet Woodworking Sheet 1
- Safe Stacking and handling of timber and board - HSE Information Sheet Woodworking Sheet
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999
- LEV Woodworking Information Sheets - HSE Information Sheet Woodworking Sheets 22, 23, 25 & 26
- Selection of respiratory protective equipment - HSE Information Sheet Woodworking Sheet 14

This information may be found at <http://www.hse.co.uk>