

Health board fined £160,000 after employees diagnosed with Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome

A Welsh health board has been fined after three employees were diagnosed with Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS).

Powys Teaching Health Board required its employees to routinely operate handheld power tools such as lawn mowers, strimmers and hedge cutters without carrying out an assessment of the risks from exposure to vibration.

There was no monitoring, or any estimate of exposure to vibration, even though employees, particularly during the summer months, operated handheld power tools for several hours a day.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found the health board had failed to properly assess the levels of exposure to its employees and that information, instruction and training given to staff was limited.

It also found that the health board had ignored requests from its own occupational health department to conduct a risk assessment.

The lack of monitoring, assessment, training and health surveillance has allowed employees to operate handheld power tools for a significant period, in some cases several decades, without having the necessary measures in place to reduce the risk. This led to three employees being diagnosed with Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome.

Powys Teaching Health Board of Glasbury House, Bronllys Hospital, Bronllys, Powys, Wales, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. They were fined £160,000 and ordered to pay costs of £5,599 at Wrexham Magistrates' Court on 22 November 2022.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Joe Boast said: "This was a case of the health board completely failing to grasp the importance of managing its staff's exposure to vibration while using handheld power tools.

"Employers should conduct a full assessment of the vibration magnitude and exposure duration, before reviewing whether employees are at risk. There is a simple online calculator to help employers complete this process.

"If the health board had followed the free guidance, they would not have exposed employees to risk and possibly have prevented the ill health that has been suffered."

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury

and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. hse.gov.uk

2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE's hand-arm vibration exposure calculator can be found here: [Hand arm vibration – Exposure Calculator \(hse.gov.uk\)](http://hse.gov.uk/hand-arm-vibration-exposure-calculator)
4. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>