

# Metalworking fluids: Most businesses inspected 'not doing enough' to protect workers

- New online quiz launched to help plug knowledge gaps

Back in September last year, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) announced it was [carrying out inspections](#). Since then more than half of those checks have identified failings.

This is a highly technical, specialist field applying precision engineering – but it can also cause harm to the lungs and skin. HSE says more needs to be done to keep workers safe.

In a bid to improve knowledge in this area, HSE has created [an online quiz](#) as part of the ongoing campaign.



The online quiz can test and improve knowledge

The [annual statistics on work-related ill health and workplace injuries](#) for 2022/23 show 12,000 people die each year from lung diseases linked to exposure to hazardous substances at work. In addition, 19,000 new cases of breathing and lung problems are thought to have been caused or made worse by work.

The manufacturing industry has a substantially higher rate than average for occupational asthma.

HSE inspector Fiona McGarry said: “It is clear that not enough is being done to protect workers and keep them safe and healthy.

“Our inspections found that there are still far too many businesses which do not have key control measures or health surveillance in place.

“As a result, enforcement action is being taken against these manufacturers.

“The creation of the quiz is a really easy way for people to test their knowledge about how best they should be protecting workers.”

Exposure to metalworking fluids – also referred to as ‘white water’ – can

cause harm to the lungs and unprotected skin. Despite this, many of the firms inspected were not carrying out health checks. Health surveillance is a legal requirement where there is exposure to fluid or mist.

The inspections so far also found poor performance around the control of metalworking fluids in businesses that use computer numerical control (CNC) machines. To protect workers, employers should reduce exposure by putting control measures in place. Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV) should be fitted on CNC machines to carry away any harmful metalworking fluid mist.



HSE inspector Fiona McGarry

HSE inspector Fiona McGarry, added: “Lung problems and irritated skin don’t have to be associated with working with metalworking fluid if you take the right precautions.

“It is really important that control measures and fluid quality checks are in place to keep workers healthy. Health checks are essential to identify signs of ill-health early.”

More about the ongoing campaign, and tips on how to keep workers safe, can be found here.

[Machinists and metalworking fluid – Work Right to keep Britain safe](#)

HSE will continue to carry out unannounced inspections between now and the end of March 2024.

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## 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.

2. More about the campaign can be found at: [Machinists and metalworking fluid – Work Right to keep Britain safe](#).
3. HSE's [annual statistics on work-related ill health and workplace injuries](#) for 2022/23 are available.
4. ☐ Test your knowledge by [taking the metalworking fluids quiz](#).