TOOLBOX TALK AWARENESS PACKAGES

HAZ-WDS · Wood Dust Awareness

Product Overview

Audience: Workers and supervisors in joinery, cabinet making, carpentry, furniture making, timber processing, construction, maintenance and school workshops · Duration: 20–30 minutes

Version 1.0 · 22 November 2026

For anyone who cuts, sands, machines or cleans up timber and wood products: what wood dust does to the lungs, nose and skin, why hardwood dust can cause nasal cancer, the fire and explosion risk, and the controls that capture the dust at the source.

Sawing, routing, sanding and machining timber, and wood products such as MDF and particleboard, make fine dust that stays in the air and settles on every surface. Breathing it can irritate the nose, throat and lungs, cause occupational asthma that can be lifelong, and cause dermatitis. Wood dust is a known cause of cancer: hardwood dust in particular causes cancer of the nose and sinuses, often many years after exposure. Fine dust that builds up can also burn or explode.

This talk covers the health effects of wood dust, the fire and explosion risk, the controls from the top of the hierarchy down (on-tool extraction and local exhaust ventilation, wet methods where they suit, vacuums with suitable filters instead of compressed air and dry sweeping, good housekeeping, and respirators that are fitted and maintained as the last line), and health monitoring. It is awareness, not training to design or test extraction systems or to fit test respirators.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session participants will be able to:

- Explain how wood dust harms health: irritation of the nose, throat and lungs, occupational asthma and sensitisation, and dermatitis
- Explain that hardwood dust is a known cause of nasal and sinus cancer, often many years after exposure
- Recognise the fire and explosion risk of fine wood dust that builds up in machines, ducts and on surfaces
- Describe the controls from the top down: on-tool extraction and local exhaust ventilation, wet methods, and vacuums instead of compressed air or dry sweeping
- Wear a respirator that is fitted, checked and maintained, as the last line of defence, not the first
- Know why health monitoring may be offered, and report symptoms and controls that are not working

What it covers

Module	Covers
Why it matters	How wood dust harms health; Hardwood dust and nasal cancer; Fire and explosion
Controls that work	Extraction at the source; Wet methods and vacuums, not blowing or sweeping; Housekeeping and respirators
Your part	Check the extraction before you start; Health monitoring and symptoms; Report it

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Activities

- Spot the dust: workers look at four jobs, from sanding a benchtop to cleaning down a saw with an air hose, and decide how the dust should be controlled
- What would you do: workers decide what to do in four situations, from extraction that is not pulling to a workmate with a constant blocked nose

What is in the package

Item	File
Editable PowerPoint presentation with speaker notes, plus PDF	02_TRAINING_PRESENTATION/Training Presentation.pptx and .pdf
Facilitator guide with a running sheet, discussion prompts and model answers	03_FACILITATOR_GUIDE/Facilitator Guide.docx and .pdf
Participant handout with the key points to take away	04_PARTICIPANT_HANDOUT/Participant Handout.docx and .pdf
Attendance record form, to capture who attended, when, and who facilitated	06_RECORDS/Attendance Record.docx and .pdf
Excel attendance register	06_RECORDS/Attendance Register.xlsx
Multiple-choice theory assessment, to record understanding if your business wants to	05_ASSESSMENT/Theory Assessment.docx and .pdf
Answer key for the assessment	05_ASSESSMENT/Assessment Answer Key.docx and .pdf
Certificate template	06_RECORDS/Certificate Template.docx
Start here: Read Me First, Product Overview, Permitted Use Terms, Version Information	01_START_HERE/ (four PDFs)

What you need to deliver it

- A facilitator such as a supervisor, leading hand or WHS adviser who has read the facilitator guide and knows your site's arrangements for the topic
- A screen or projector, or printed slides or handouts: it works in a crib room, site office or on a video call
- Your own site procedures for the topic, to point to during the session

Questions

Is a dust mask enough? No. A respirator is the last line of defence, used on top of extraction and good housekeeping, not instead of them. It only protects if it suits wood dust, fits the wearer's face, is checked every time and is maintained or replaced. The talk explains why capturing the dust at the source comes first, and asks you to add your own respirator arrangements and fit testing.

Can we add our own site procedures and photos? Yes. The slides, handout and guide are editable, and the facilitator guide marks the places to add your own procedures, contacts and photos of your workplace.

Do we have to use the assessment? No. It is there if your business wants a record that each worker understood the key points. The attendance record on its own shows who attended and when.

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TOOLBOX TALK

Wood Dust Awareness

What wood dust does to your health, and how to keep it out of the air

20–30 minutes · Workers and supervisors in joinery, cabinet making, carpentry, furniture making, timber processing, construction, maintenance and school workshops

[Company name] · [Date] · [Facilitator name]

WDS

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What this talk is, and is not

This talk covers

- ✓ How wood dust harms health
- ✓ Fire and explosion
- ✓ Controls at the source
- ✓ Respirators and health monitoring

This talk is not

- ✗ Extraction system design or testing
- ✗ Respirator fit testing
- ✗ Machine safety training
- ✗ Our procedure: **[Our dust procedure]**

Awareness only. Extraction design and testing, fit testing and machine training need competent people.

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How wood dust harms health

The finest dust does the harm, and you cannot always see it.

- Sore eyes, runny or blocked nose, coughing
- Occupational asthma and sensitisation: can be lifelong
- Dermatitis: red, itchy, cracked skin
- Hardwood dust: a known cause of nose and sinus cancer
- MDF and board products: wood dust plus resins

A composite example

- A cabinet maker sands every day with the extraction off because the hose gets in the way.
- After a few years he wheezes at work and at night. His doctor says it is occupational asthma, and it does not go away.

Once you are sensitised, even a little dust can set it off.

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Duties under health and safety laws

The business must

- Keep exposure to wood dust as low as it can
- Provide and maintain extraction
- Monitor the air or health where needed
- Provide suitable respirators and training

You must

- Use the extraction every time
- Clean up with a vacuum, not air or a broom
- Wear and look after your respirator
- Report symptoms and faults

Most health and safety laws give these duties. Check the law where you work (in Australia, WHS or OHS laws).

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The order of controls for wood dust

1. **Elimination** Buy timber cut to size; fewer cuts on site
2. **Substitution** Less dusty methods and tools; timbers less likely to sensitise
3. **Isolation** Dusty work in a separate area or booth
4. **Engineering** On-tool extraction, local exhaust ventilation, wet methods
5. **Administrative** Housekeeping with vacuums, maintenance, training
6. **PPE** Respirators fitted and maintained; gloves for skin

HIGHER ORDER

Higher order controls remove or control the hazard at the source, or put a barrier between people and the hazard.

LOWER ORDER

Lower order controls rely on people to do a thing or wear a thing, every time, tired, distracted or rushed.

Behaviours are not on the hierarchy, but behaviours and culture decide whether every control on it actually works.

A respirator is the last line, not the first.

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Wood Dust Awareness

Participant handout · keep this

Wood dust harms lungs, nose and skin, and fine dust can burn. Keep this page.

The order of controls

1. Fewer cuts: timber cut to size
2. Less dusty methods and timbers
3. Dusty work in a separate area
4. Extraction, local exhaust and wet methods
5. Vacuum housekeeping, maintenance, training
6. Respirators fitted and maintained, last

Health effects

- Irritation, asthma, dermatitis
- Hardwood dust: nose and sinus cancer

Never

- Blow dust with compressed air
- Dry sweep

Before you start

- ☐ Is the extraction on, connected and pulling?
- ☐ Is the machine or tool's dust port clear?
- ☐ Do I have a vacuum, not an air hose or broom, for clean-up?
- ☐ Is my respirator right for the job, checked and fitting?
- ☐ Is dust building up on machines, ledges or floors?

Report

- Wheezing, tight chest, constant blocked nose
- Itchy, red or cracked skin; extraction faults

Who and how

- **[Extraction checks]; [Respirator arrangements]**
- **[Who to report to here]**

Capture the dust at the source. Never blow it, never dry sweep it.

This is awareness training. It is not a licence, a ticket, a permit or a competency. It is not extraction design, fit testing or machine training.

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