

Clothing and Textiles

RSI/Musculoskeletal Disorders

In common with women working on production lines, clothing and textile workers are at risk of developing RSI they are also at great risk of suffering from chronic neck and shoulder pain.

Neck and shoulder pain affects many sewing machine operators and tends to worsen the longer the person works as a machinist.

Some women workers may also face health hazards such as muscular and other physical problems, eye fatigue and stress from having to use VDUs in the course of their work.

"Sweat shops" are still common in the UK, with women working in cramped conditions for long hours in run down buildings with little if any fire precautions.

Dust is also a big health issue in the textiles industry - causing respiratory problems.

Sewing Machinists face a range of further hazards including contact with drive belts and pulley wheels, cutter blades and trimming knives; abrasions from contact with rough surfaces and injuries from compressed air and from particles in their eyes blown by compressors.

See next page for **Hazards of Clothing & Textile Work** and **Action Checklist**

Some Relevant Law

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

The Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

The Noise at Work Regulations 1989

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992

Some Further Information

T & G leaflet: Do you suffer from Aches and Pains in silence?

HSE booklet: Preventing Asthma at Work L55 £6.25

HSE leaflet Preventing Dermatitis at Work INDG233 - free

HSE leaflet Manual handling in the textiles Industry IACL 103 - free

HSE leaflet Hazards from dyes & chemicals in the textile industry TIS4 -free

HSE leaflet Fire safety in small textile factories IACL107 – free

HSE leaflet Dust control in dyestuff handling TIS6 – free

RSI Hazards Handbook - a workers' guide to Repetitive Strain Injuries and how to prevent them - London Hazards Centre, Hampstead Town Hall Centre, 213 Haverstock Hill, London NW3 4QP £4.50.

Hazards of Clothing and Textile Work

- Repetitive work leading to RSI
 - Stooping over sewing machines can cause shoulder and neck pain.
 - Detailed work with poor lighting can cause eyestrain.
 - Chemical dyes can cause a variety of health problems from dermatitis, occupational asthma and cancer
 - Traumatic injuries to the fingers from sewing machine needles; cuts from trimming knives and cutter blades
 - Manual handling leading to back injuries
 - Wool process dust causing respiratory problems
 - Moving parts of machinery trapping fingers or arms
 - Noise from machinery
 - Hot surfaces such as steamers causing burns
 - Stress from lack of control over work pace and load and monotony of work.
 - Bullying supervisors
 - Blocked fire exits and faulty wiring
 - Risk of injury to eyes from dust particles blown from compressors
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Action Checklist

1. Has repetitive work been assessed and the risks of developing RSI reduced? Have risk assessments been carried out?
2. Are machines and seating designed to ensure workers do not have to stoop over equipment?
3. Is lighting adequate for the work to be carried out?
4. Have COSHH assessments been carried out & toxic chemicals substituted for safer alternatives? Are levels of wool process dust controlled.
5. Have manual handling risk assessments been carried out?
6. Are workers trained in safe lifting methods?
7. Are moving parts of machines guarded (including sewing machine needles)? Are machines regularly inspected/maintained? Is personal protective equipment provided?
8. Have noise assessments been done?
9. Are there stress and bullying policies?
10. Does the premises have a valid fire certificate? Are fire exits visible, marked & free from obstruction?
11. Is eye protection provided?

Pregnancy Hazards

Heavy repetitive work, cramped sitting positions, prolonged standing, chemicals (boron and boric acid, arsenic, dimethyl sulphate, carbon disulphide, dimethylformamide, epichlorinhydrin, ethylene oxide, ethyleneimine, formaldehyde and vinyl chloride).