



25.47 Working In Construction – Key Health Facts

Introduction

Construction (and demolition) work can expose workers to several direct & indirect health hazards.

In addition to the obvious risks from noise, dust and vibration, there are less obvious ones such as the poor lifestyles encouraged by transient and mobile work (living out of hotels) & the mental health toll of being away from family & friends for extended periods.



Direct Health Risks

Cancer

Construction has the highest level of occupational cancer, accounting for over 40% of occupational cancer deaths and registrations.

Silicosis and Lung Disease

Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS) can cause Lung Cancer, COPD, Silicosis and other respiratory diseases through permanent lung damage.

Skin Problems

Dermatitis and other skin problems are common in construction due to harsh environments and exposure to dust and chemicals.

Noise Induced Hearing Loss

Construction sites often exceed 85 dB, enough to causing permanent hearing damage or tinnitus, and negatively affect mental health via prolonged exposure.

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome

Powered hand tool use such as breakers, whackers, and Stihl saws can lead to debilitating conditions like Vibration White Finger (VWF) and Vibration Induced Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (V-CTS).

Whole Body Vibration

A musculoskeletal injury associated with driving over rough or uneven ground. Resulting potentially in back, neck, and joint pain.

Indirect Health Risks

Poor Lifestyle

The transient nature of construction work often means workers live away from home for long periods, resulting in a poor diet, increased alcohol consumption, and limited opportunity for exercise.

Poor Mental Health

A major issue in construction. Long hours, tight deadlines, job insecurity, a "macho" culture, and time away from family contribute to stress, anxiety, loneliness, and isolation.

What should I do?

Ask your employer to introduce a robust programme of health surveillance and occupational health. Look for work that requires Safety Critical certification.

Raise health (including mental health) concerns with your family and GP.

Try to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

Take time out to address health issues in a timely fashion.

Talk earnestly about how you feel with someone that cares.