

Company director avoids prison over wood dust failures

The director of a Norwich woodworking company has avoided an immediate spell behind bars after he exposed his employees to harmful wood dust.

Wood dust can cause serious and often irreversible health problems, including sino-nasal cancer, asthma and dermatitis. Employers have a legal responsibility to prevent or adequately control exposure in the workplace.

John Risby, the director of Turners and Moore Limited, was given a four month custodial sentence, suspended for two years, at Norwich Magistrates Court. The 33-year-old's company was also fined £40,000.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) carried out an inspection at the firm's Hurricane Way site on November 2017, which identified significant failings in its measures to control exposure of employees to wood dust. Enforcement action was taken, however a subsequent inspection in August 2022 showed the company had failed to maintain standards and further enforcement action was taken.

Dust extraction and vacuuming instead of sweeping can be some of the measures taken to control exposure to workers. Guidance on working in the [woodworking industry](#) is available and an [inspection-led campaign to protect workers continues](#).

Turners and Moore Limited of Hurricane Way, Norwich was fined £40,000 after pleading guilty to breaches of Sections 2 (1) and 3 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The company must also pay £2,000 in costs. Director John Risby was given a four month custodial sentence, suspended for two years. He will also pay costs of £1,100 for breaching section 37 of the same Act.

After the hearing, HSE inspector Natalie Prince said: "This outcome should send a strong message out to anyone with a responsibility for protecting workers.

"Exposure to wood dust can cause serious ongoing health problems and businesses must do all that they can to protect their workers.

"This outcome should underline to those in the woodworking industry that the courts, and HSE, take a failure to protect the health of employees extremely seriously and will not hesitate to take action against companies that fail to do so."

This HSE prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Gemma Zakrzewski and paralegal officer Sarah Thomas.

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 information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.