

# Company fined after repeatedly exposing workers to risks from wood dust

A Blackburn-based furniture manufacturer has been fined after it repeatedly failed to protect its own workers from exposure to wood dust.

Pendle Woodcraft (Blackburn) Limited failed to implement safe working practices despite earlier interventions from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The company consistently failed to control the accumulation of wood dust at its site in Darwen, Lancashire. Wood dust can cause serious and often irreversible health problems, including dermatitis and when breathed in excessively it can cause asthma and in the case of hardwood dust nasal cancer. Wood dust is also known to be flammable and, in certain situations, can cause a fire or explosion.



HSE inspectors repeatedly identified large amounts of wood dust during visits

HSE provides a range of [guidance on working in the woodworking industry](#), covering the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002; exposure limits; extraction; and health surveillance.

Inspectors from the HSE carried out a series of visits to the company over an eight year period, repeatedly identifying large amounts of wood dust. The first of those visits came in November 2015, when HSE offered advice on the control of wood dust. The site was visited again in April 2019, November 2021, and finally on 5 June 2023, as part of the workplace regulator's [Dust Kills campaign](#), which targeted woodworking businesses due to the significant health risks associated with wood dust.

However, on each of these three occasions inspectors observed excessive

amounts of wood dust and served Improvement Notices.



An inspector's boot shows the scale of the wood dust found

Pendle Woodcraft (Blackburn) Limited, Cotton Hall Street Darwen, Lancashire pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, and were fined £6,000, and ordered to pay costs of £2,926.55 on 15 January 2024 at a hearing in Blackburn Magistrates Court.



Exposure to wood dust can have a significant impact on the health of workers

After the hearing, HSE Inspector Tracy Fox said: "This company repeatedly failed to protect its own workers.

"Wood dust is a substance hazardous to health because it can cause serious non-reversible health problems, including asthma; dermatitis; and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat and all businesses need to protect their workers' respiratory health.

"The expected standard is to control exposure to wood dust to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

"Companies need to be aware that when HSE identifies repeated similar significant failings in the workplace, a prosecution will always be considered."

The prosecution was brought by HSE enforcement lawyer Chloe Ward and paralegal officer Helen Hugo.

**Further information:**

1. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives.
2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.
4. HSE does not pass sentences, set guidelines or collect any fines imposed. Relevant sentencing guidelines must be followed unless the court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so. The sentencing guidelines for health and safety offences in England and Wales can be found [here](#) and for those in Scotland [here](#).