



# ORR occupational health programme update

January 2018

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## Introduction

This quarterly brief updates you on progress with some of the work being developed under [ORR's Occupational Health programme 2014-19](#), to inform discussions on health with ORR inspectors. We have identified key messages for rail duty holders and would welcome [feedback](#). You can now subscribe to occupational health [news](#).

## This issue focuses on:

- The new ORR 'Fitness for work' guidance
- Help for rail companies on HAVS
- Action on silica: IOSH cross-industry pledge

## 1. 'Fitness for work' guidance

Protecting and maintaining a fit workforce is an important issue for rail employers. Following the changes to the law on train driver licences (Train Driver Licences and Certificate Regulations, 2010), ORR has received enquiries on the subject of fitness for work, particularly regarding the requirements around safety critical work. This guidance aims to help rail employers understand where responsibilities lie, as well as to know where to find the relevant information sources.

Recent incidents and investigations, in both the rail sector and beyond, have underlined the importance of fitness for work assessments and the difficult decision-making surrounding them.

It is essential that there is effective collaboration between human resources, occupational health, managers, and individuals who undertake safety critical work.

ORR has recently published new comprehensive [guidance on fitness to work](#) to help those in the rail industry identify key sources of information, navigate the various

legal requirements, and support more consistent and informed decision-making on fitness for work assessments.

## Key messages:

- Are you up-to-date on the legal requirements and good practice principles relating to fitness to work, including those for safety critical work? Do your current fitness for work procedures support effective collaboration between HR and OH professionals, as well as line managers and employees?
- Employee safety representatives have an important role in encouraging workers to attend medical assessments, raise workplace issues and challenge companies on how they are delivering their fitness for work scheme.
- Do you know when statutory health surveillance checks are necessary, and how they fit with wider fitness for work considerations? Are you complying with the required [reporting procedure](#) following diagnoses of certain occupational diseases under the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013?

## 2. Help for rail companies on HAVS

Effective management of hand arm vibration exposures continues to be a challenge for some in our industry. This is shown through the volume of hand arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) cases reported to ORR under RIDDOR and from ORR inspections.

We continue to see examples of rail employers failing to apply the control hierarchy properly and instead relying on job rotation to manage individual worker exposures rather than looking at better job design. We want to see a focus on health by design through reducing the use of hand held power tools where possible, in addition to the selection of lower vibration tools which must be properly maintained.

Effective health surveillance is also important to detect any HAVS symptoms early and prevent the condition progressing. An ORR review of HAVS health surveillance among mainline contractors and labour suppliers found that some contractors' employees, and a significant part of the labour-only workforce, may not be getting sufficient health surveillance to detect HAVS early.

ORR has been working with the mainline industry, via the Rail Principal Contractors' Group (RPCG), to agree a workable solution for better HAVS risk management and health surveillance through the supply chain, with particular focus on the role of the contractor in control of the work and the labour-only supplier,

The RPCG working group has now agreed guidance on the roles and responsibilities of clients, contractors and labour suppliers for HAVS risk management. The guidance also suggests a practical way of sharing essential information on HAV exposures on site, and on health surveillance outcomes (fitness for work with vibrating tools) through the supply chain.

The RPCG is seeking formal support for this new guidance before its publication by RSSB.

## Key messages:

- For more information about HAVS management, sign up for the RSSB one-day conference on 21 February. The day will include presentations on good practices being developed within rail companies, including the RPCG guidance for contractors and labour-only suppliers. ORR will provide the regulator's view and QBE will outline the position of HAVS claims being faced by rail companies. Registration closes on 14 February and is on a first-come first-served basis. Please note that places are limited. To secure your place and avoid disappointment, please register using [this link](#).
- Are you complying with the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005? Can you demonstrate that you are applying the hierarchy of control, with proper consideration to job design and tool selection rather than relying on job rotation? We have included guidance on relevant law and good practice in previous editions of the update. You can use the topic index on our quarterly update page to identify particular areas of interest. Have a look at the [June 2017](#) and [July 2016](#) editions on HAVS, for example.
- Mainline contractors and labour suppliers can find practical guidance on their responsibilities for managing HAV risk, including HAVS health surveillance, via the RPCG guidance due for publication soon.

## 3. Action on silica dust: IOSH cross industry pledge

In Britain alone, around 800 people die every year from workplace exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) across all industry sectors. In response, around 18 months ago, IOSH launched the 'No Time to Lose' (NTTL) campaign to tackle occupational cancer caused by exposure to RCS at work. ORR and Network Rail were among a number of leading organisations from across the UK and abroad to pledge their support to this campaign. In November, IOSH reported on the campaign's progress so far. See '[Tackling respirable crystalline silica together](#)' for more information.

Those who had signed the cross industry pledge reported on eliminating the risk by substituting silica-based materials and looking at methods for controlling dust at source, with the majority also actively reviewing their contractors' risk assessments for silica dust. ORR and Network Rail reported on recent progress in assessing and reducing exposures to silica dust in track renewals and property maintenance tasks, achieved by the use of improved engineering controls, systems of work, more effective respiratory protective equipment, and collaborative work with the mainline ballast dust working group.

As part of ORR's commitment to the campaign, we are working to raise industry awareness of potential risks to health from work with silica dust using an interview with a worker who developed both silicosis and hand arm vibration syndrome, and the impact it has had on his life. We plan to promote short interview clips on our website and via social media, and will include them in future quarterly health updates.

## Key messages:

- We want to see more rail companies make a public commitment to do more to tackle occupational cancers. With silica second only to asbestos in causing work related cancers, now is the time for the rail industry to show real leadership. Will your company commit to tackle occupational cancers?
- Do your workers appreciate the risks from exposure to concrete, stone, cement and brick dust? Do they understand that fine dust particles that can reach deep into their lungs are invisible under normal lighting? The free 'NTTL' silica campaign resources which include posters, leaflets, pocket cards and tool box talks, could be a powerful tool for communicating these messages. Mainline workers should start to see Network Rail-branded versions of the IOSH silica resources as part of their commitment to the NTTL campaign.



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