New BOHS guidance highlights the need to control cancer risks arising from Diesel Engine Exhaust Emissions at work

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The British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS), the Chartered Society for Worker Health Protection, and the Faculty of Occupational Hygiene, have published new Guidance for Occupational Hygienists on the Assessment and Control of the Health Risks from Diesel Engine Exhaust Emissions (DEEEs). While the guidance provides professional information for experts, it should also help health and safety and other professionals understand the required approaches to control exposure to diesel engine exhaust emissions.

Scientific experts are calling on employers who use diesel powered plant, equipment and vehicles to ensure that they understand the best way of controlling emissions or obtain expert competent advice to assist them.

“Diesel engines power significant parts of the UK economy. Whilst a transition to other power sources is best for the environment and for human health, it is not always easy to do so.” says BOHS President-Elect, Sarah Leeson.

“If diesel engine exhaust emissions are present in the workplace, they need to be controlled so that harmful exposures are reduced to as low a level as can be reasonably achieved. We have produced this guidance to help enable those responsible for health in the workplace to ensure that this is achievable.”

Research studies have highlighted that DEEEs create serious occupational health risks. DEEEs are associated with increased risks of cervical cancer in women[i], progressively increased risks of lung cancer as exposure increases[ii], head and neck cancer, as well as laryngeal cancer[iii] , gastric and rectal cancers in drivers and oesophageal cancers in machinery operators[iv]. Short-term exposure to diesel engine exhaust emissions can cause eye and respiratory irritation, headaches, nausea and dizziness.

It is estimated that occupational exposure to diesel engine exhaust emissions contributes to around 650 deaths each year in the UK primarily from lung and bladder cancer[v] . Thousands more workers are thought to be exposed to diesel fumes as part of their daily work, particularly in construction, transport, logistics, warehousing, mining, manufacturing and maintenance activities.

The guidance supplements and provides updated information to complement the Health and Safety Executive’s guidance HSG187, Control of diesel engine exhaust emissions in the workplace – HSE (2012) reflecting advances in technology, current scientific evidence and continuing public health concerns.

Diesel engine exhaust emissions are a complex mixture of harmful substances and their composition varies depending on factors such as engine age, maintenance, operating conditions and fuel type, meaning exposure levels can differ widely between workplaces.

While ultra-low sulphur fuels, diesel particulate filters (DPFs) and new technology diesel engines (NTDE) have reduced some emissions, these measures have not eliminated risk, particularly where diesel-powered vehicles or plant operate in enclosed or poorly ventilated environments.

The new BOHS guidance is designed to help occupational hygienists and employers:

- Understand the nature and variability of diesel engine exhaust exposures
- Carry out effective measurement and assessment of the health risks
- Identify and implement appropriate control measures
- Reduce preventable cases of serious work-related ill health

BOHS CEO Professor Kevin Bampton commented, “It’s 14 years since the diesel engine exhaust emissions were declared to be cancer-causing and personal injury lawyers in the UK are now actively recruiting clients who think that they may have been over-exposed to emissions at work. Controlling exhaust emissions is not only an environmental must and morally right as an employer, but it should be up there on the corporate risk register as something that could have a serious impact on the current and future balance sheet, if not managed correctly.”

Media:

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Related Keywords:

Diesel Engine Exhaust Emissions :: Diesel Exhaust Cancer Risk :: Occupational Cancer :: Workplace Cancer Risk :: Controlling Diesel Exhaust :: Diesel Fumes At W ::

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[i] Risk of Gynaecological and Breast Cancers in Workers Exposed to Diesel Exhaust: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Cohort Studies – PMC

[ii] Dose-response-relationship between occupational exposure to diesel engine emissions and lung cancer risk: A systematic review and meta-analysis – ScienceDirect

[iii] European Journal of Cancer Prevention

[iv] Gastrointestinal cancer and occupational diesel exhaust exposure: a meta-analysis of cohort studies | Occupational Medicine | Oxford Academic

[v] https://oem.bmj.com/content/oemed/65/12/789.full.pdf

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