

# Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) 1992

**These regulations, if fully implemented by employers, would do much to reduce the injuries suffered by workers daily. More than 100,000 UK workers who were injured in 1994 were using defective or inappropriate work equipment.**

Many employers do not know that PUWER exists and because of weak enforcement it will be up to workers and their Safety Representatives to monitor how employers implement the regulations and to report instances of non-compliance to the enforcement agencies, namely the local council's Environmental Health Department or the regional office of the Health and Safety Executive.

## Examples of dangerous work equipment

- Badly designed hand tools such as screwdrivers, handsaws, drills and knives which strain wrists and cause carpal tunnel syndrome, etc.
- Air powered machine tools that do not have fail-safe cut outs.
- Unguarded power tools or machine tools.
- Items used to jury-rig a job.
- Badly organised workstations.
- Assembly lines running at speeds they were not designed for.
- Photocopiers that are not regularly maintained and emit ozone.
- Sewing machines with elbow operated speed controls that cause RSI.
- Printing machines causing unnecessary bending of the wrists to load the card/paper feed-hoppers.

## Where PUWER Applies

Regulations 1 to 10 came into force for all work equipment in all workplaces on 1 January 1993. If the equipment was owned or rented by the firm/organisation before 1 January 1993, employers are exempted from implementing regulations 11 to 27 until 1 January 1997.

Where there is an overlap between the general standards set by PUWER and specific standards set by other regulations (e.g. the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992) then compliance with the specific regulations will mean that the standards set by PUWER are met. The Regulations do not cover crew

on sea-going ships under the control of a Master. The nation's armed forces may be exempted by a specific exemption certificate signed by the Secretary of State for Defence.

The Regulations do apply to offshore oil and gas installations, diving support vessels, heavy lift barges and pipe-lay barges.

## The Regulations

All employers, and the self-employed, have a duty to make sure that all work place equipment complies with the Regulations (Reg 4).

Equipment must only be used for the tasks for which it was designed (Reg 5).

PUWER must be implemented alongside Reg 3. of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 (every employer must complete Risk Assessments of all work tasks involving the use of equipment).

## Maintenance

The equipment must be efficiently maintained (Reg 6).

Employers must ensure that maintenance of equipment is conducted safely and equipment must be shut down where appropriate (Reg 22).

## Information

Written information and instructions must be provided on the proper use of the equipment. It must be in a form that is comprehensible to workers e.g. in the first language of workers or in a form readily understandable by those who may be dyslexic or have impaired literacy skills (Reg 8).

Such information and instruction must be backed up by training in the safe use of work equipment (Reg 9).

All markings required by legislation must be clearly visible and warnings or warning devices incorporated into work equipment for reasons of operator safety should be

unambiguous, easily perceived and easily understood (Reg 23).

## Guards and protection

Machinery must have fixed guards or, if that is not practicable because the technology does not exist, then other forms of guard or protection devices e.g. push sticks on circular saw benches. If none of this is practicable, information, instruction, training and supervision must be provided (Reg 11).

Employers must take action so as not to expose workers to risks arising from (Reg 12):

- articles or substances falling or being ejected from work equipment (e.g. dust from grinding machines)
- the rupture or disintegration of the equipment (e.g. abrasive wheels)
- the equipment catching fire or overheating
- the unintended or premature discharge of any article, gas, dust, liquid, vapour or other substance which is used, produced or stored by the equipment

- explosions of the equipment or any article or substance used, produced or stored in the equipment

Workers should be protected against burns, scalds and cold sears likely to be caused by any part of work equipment or articles or substances used, produced or stored by equipment (Reg 13). All fixed and mobile equipment must be stabilised to prevent it from collapsing or overturning (Reg 20) and there must be sufficient light, suitably provided, for workers to use machines safely (Reg 21).

A permit to work system must be implemented where a specific risk to workers is identified by risk assessment (Reg 7).

## Controls

Equipment must have controls for starting and controlling the use of equipment where that is appropriate (Reg 14). For example, a pair of manual scissors does not need a 'start button' but electrical shears would.

Equipment must have, where appropriate,

control(s) to stop the equipment safely (Reg 15). Equipment must have, where appropriate, emergency stop controls (Reg 16). All controls on or of work equipment must be both clearly identifiable and visible (Reg 17).

All equipment control systems must be fail-safe. For example, if the control system fails it must be able to be stopped by a 'stop' or 'emergency stop' device (Reg 18).

Powered equipment must be able to be isolated from its source of energy (the electricity, gas, air or water that drives it) and the means of isolation must be clearly identifiable (Reg. 19).

## Action

- Formulate action plan
- Inspect all work equipment
- Report flaws to employers
- Report negligent employers to enforcement agencies
- Refuse to work with unsafe equipment

*Work Equipment: Guidance on Regulations; £5 from HSE Books on 01787-881165.*

