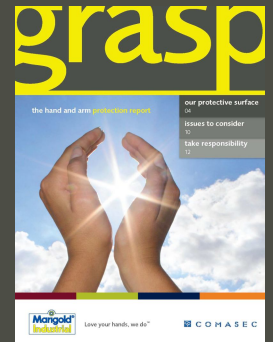


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Grasping hand and arm protection

10 years after it was first launched, hand protection experts Marigold Industrial Ltd has updated, refreshed and re-launched its much-acclaimed Grasp, Hand & Arm Protection Report.

Here, Donald Gillespie of Marigold Industrial takes a fresh look at the key issues when it comes to hand protection, and shows that despite growing awareness of the importance of hand protection there is much that can still be done to reduce the many thousands of hand injuries and cases of skin damage and disease that are reported every year.



Hand injuries including skin damage and disease continue to affect many thousands of workers and businesses across the country every year.

The reason? The hands remain one of the most vital tools in the UK workplace, and because of their irreplaceable skills and capabilities, they are exposed to a wide range of hand hazards almost every working day.

The challenge remains very much the same for employers as it has always done – to identify the hand hazards in the workplace and provide the right type and level of protection required by workers.

HAND INJURIES AND SKIN DISEASE IN THE WORKPLACE

According to the latest statistics from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2007/08 an estimated 20,000 individuals who worked in that 12-month period suffered skin problems, which they believed to be work related.

Added to this were over 15,000 reported injuries to the fingers or thumbs, almost 8,000 injuries to the hands and almost 7,000 injuries to the wrists, costing many millions of pounds in down time and lost working days and in many cases exposing employers to the risk of court action and compensation claims against them.

The critical step in reducing then threat of workplace hand and arm injuries is by identifying the hazards that hands are exposed to.

The majority of hazards can be grouped into four types – Chemical, Mechanical, Thermal and Electrical.

Chemical Hazards

Some chemicals are undisguised with clearly defined dangers. Others are not so obvious.

Some chemical hazards do not cause immediate harm. Instead it is the cumulative exposure over months, even years, which eventually causes irreversible damage.

Despite being the body's natural armour, skin can only take a limited amount of abuse and eventually after repeated attack it may lose the ability to protect itself, which is when the damage eventually becomes visible, becoming red and inflamed, itchy and split, sometimes even blistering. This is irritant dermatitis, an umbrella term covering a multitude of skin diseases – one of the most common skin problems in the workplace.

Where people are working with chemicals, it is vital that the chemical is identified and the right glove material, providing the right level of protection is selected. Leading manufacturers can offer support materials such as Chemical Permeation Chart's enabling you to identify which gloves materials and styles offer the best protection against common chemicals.

Mechanical Hazards

A mechanical hazard is one involving the threat of a cut, crush or general abrasion. It can range from heavy production line machinery to puncture hazards. Sharp tools are an obvious threat, but there is also the danger of razor sharp metal edges from items such as sheet metal or polyurethane sheeting in packaging.

Some mechanical hazards can also result in micro damage to the skin – such as swarf in the engineering sector – the damage allowing substances to be absorbed into the skin that, whilst barely noticeable, can cause long term harm.

Thermal Hazards

A lot of trades expose the hands of workers to thermal hazards; fierce heats generated in molten glass and steel plants, or undertaking maintenance tasks on plant and machinery.

In addition to being caused by heat, thermal hazards are also caused by extremely cold temperatures and environments such as those working in freezer rooms and cold stores.

In an ideal world, hand hazards would be eradicated by control measures, engineering out the need for human contact and intervention with any hazard.

Hazard Free?

Practically, it is rarely possible to guarantee everywhere a hand hazard-free zone and as a result protection and prevention must be the ultimate priority. Gloves provide the final physical barrier between the hazard and the skin.

The key to successful glove selection is in not only identifying the type of hazards being encountered, but adding to that the demand for glove performance, specific working conditions and the needs of the individual wearer.

If you are unsure in any way as to exactly what the hand hazard is, then you should have no hesitation in
It is still the fact today that correct glove selection is not given the attention it deserves.

Glove Features

Once the type of hazard has been assessed and identified and the right type of material/materials to provide protection, it is important to consider other features that are required including:

Grip – A lack of grip can itself cause a health and safety hazard, particularly when heavy, smooth or wet objects are being carried.

Comfort – Provide gloves that the wearer finds uncomfortable and there will be a reluctance to wear them.

Dexterity – If a glove has to be removed to enable the wearer to undertake the job properly then it is completely self-defeating.

Length – The length of the glove will be important - especially when there is a hazard that threatens the wrist or forearm or higher up the arm where protective sleeves are concerned.



Prevention is the key

Hands must be protected at all times where there is a risk of damage to the skin or physical injury. It is important therefore that the business owner, health and safety manager and employees become aware of the risks of not protecting the hands and work together to ensure the correct gloves are selected for the job in hand.

This can only be achieved by providing good quality gloves, manufactured by a reputable company, a glove that is chosen to provide the right level of protection, which fits comfortably and that are fit for the work being undertaken.

For more information on the range of gloves and educational and support materials from Marigold Industrial Ltd call 0845 075 3355 email ukenquiries@marigold-industrial.com.