



## DIESEL RECLASSIFIED BY HEALTH EXPERTS

Workplace health and safety campaigners are calling for action to protect workers from diesel exhaust fumes after experts at the World Health Organization (WHO) recently reclassified diesel as a top rated “Group 1” carcinogen, in the same category as asbestos and tobacco.

In a statement, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which is part of the WHO, confirmed the classification of diesel engine exhaust as carcinogenic to humans and falling within the Group 1 list of substances, based on “sufficient evidence that exposure is associated with an increased risk for lung cancer”.

The IARC also confirmed links to bladder cancer, associated with diesel fumes.

Previously, in 1988, the IARC had classified diesel exhaust as “probably carcinogenic to humans” and falling within Group 2A.

Commenting on the change, Dr Christopher Portier, Chairman of the IARC Working Group, said, “The scientific evidence was compelling and the Working Group’s conclusion was unanimous: diesel engine exhaust causes lung cancer in humans.”

### CONTROLLING THE RISKS FROM DIESEL EXHAUST FUMES

HSE Guidance document, *HSG 187 Control of diesel engine exhaust emissions in the workplace*, recommends that, as with other workplace hazards, prevention of exposure to diesel exhaust fumes should be considered first. An example of this might be a programme of replacement for old diesel powered fork-lift trucks in favour of electric or LPG powered ones.

Where it is not possible to eliminate the hazard then steps should be taken to adequately control exposure. Examples of general controls include:

- workplace air extraction fans;
- tailpipe exhaust extraction systems;
- the use of filters attached to tailpipes;
- catalytic converters;

and more general control measures such as:

- turning off engines when not required;
- keeping doors and windows open where practicable;
- installing air vents in the walls and ceiling;
- job rotation; and
- providing suitable personal protective equipment (suitable gloves should be worn when handling hot and cold diesel fuel).

Respiratory protective equipment should only be provided as a last resort when other means of control are not suitable.

The presence of soot on the walls or on other surfaces in the workplace is a useful indicator that diesel fumes are not being adequately controlled.



Diesel operated fork-lift trucks tend to produce high quantities of DEEEs. The degree of exposure depends on the number of vehicles in use at any one time, the condition of the engines, the way they are driven, the site of operation within the warehouse etc.

When purchasing fork-lift trucks, employers should consider the use of electrically driven or propane fuelled vehicles. Exposure to DEEEs can be reduced by keeping warehouse doors open to circulate the air and also by installing roof or wall mounted extraction. Furthermore, regular servicing of the trucks will improve the performance of the engines and hence reduce emissions.

Where it is unavoidable for a lorry to enter a warehouse for loading/unloading, or where a delivery van is in a loading bay in a despatch area, the engines of these vehicles need to be switched off unless required to drive hydraulic systems. When it is necessary to run the engine, other control measures should be used, such as an extraction system or a suitable filter system attached to the tailpipe.