



**HSWA and  
work-related  
health**



## HSWA and work-related health

Work-related health is about the fact our work can affect our health and our health can affect our work.

While good work is usually good for us, we can become unwell (mentally and physically) from the work we do and the environment we work in. Likewise, sometimes our health might impact on our ability to work safely.

Having good work-related health practices helps manage these risks.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) says all businesses – now officially known as PCBUs (persons conducting a business or undertaking) – have a **duty of care** to protect their workers from workplaces risks, including work-related health risks.

This is an introduction to what people in the forestry industry can do to manage work-related health under HSWA.

### Why is work-related health important?

Every year some 600 to 900 people die from work-related health conditions in New Zealand – and about 80% of them are men. Another 30,000 people suffer from work-related health conditions each year.

If preventative measures aren't taken or aren't effective, work-related health conditions can get worse.

- ▶ These may be **chronic** (low exposures and effects caused over a longer period of time, e.g. hearing getting gradually worse from loud and repeated noise exposure).
- ▶ These may be **acute** (high exposure levels with effects coming on quickly, e.g. sudden hearing loss from an acute high-intensity noise, such as blasting).

These health conditions can lead to impairments that mean a worker becomes a safety risk to others or themselves. For example, if noise induced hearing loss means they can't hear warnings or understand safety instructions.

▶ 1

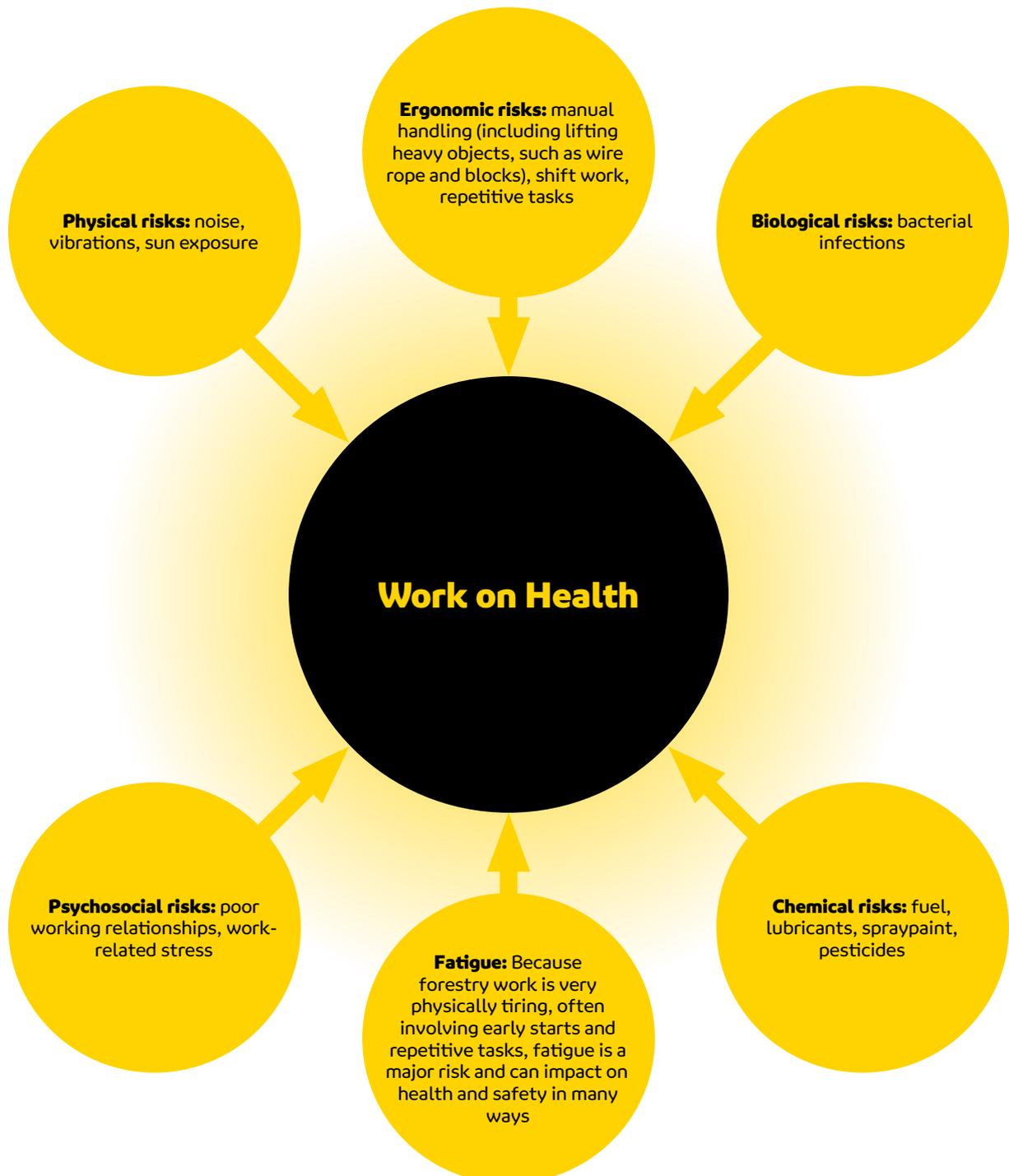


## The impact of work on health

Protecting worker health and safety should be the priority for any business. Any workplace health risks must be managed just like any safety risks.

Forestry has several tasks or situations where the work people do can impact on their physical and/or mental health. Problems may develop if safe and healthy work practices are not followed, such as:

- ▶ noisy equipment causing noise induced hearing loss (NIHL)
- ▶ vibrating tools (e.g. chainsaws) causing conditions such as vibration white finger, or vibrating machines causing chronic lower back conditions
- ▶ repetitive tasks causing discomfort, pain and injury conditions (used to be known as repetitive strain injuries, RSI, or occupational overuse syndrome, OOS)
- ▶ exposure to hazardous substances, such as herbicides or pesticides, caused by not wearing the recommended **personal protective equipment (PPE)**.



## Managing work-on-health risks

As they would for any workplace risk assessment, businesses need to look around the workplace. They need to think about how the work is being organised and carried out, and where the work is being done – the workplace environment.

They need to ask, “What here could possibly harm my workers’ health?”

**Anything new?** They also need to think about how changes in the workplace could affect work-related health risks, and how those should be managed.

### Taking action

If something is identified, a business must then manage the risk as far as is reasonably practicable. The goal must always be to **eliminate** the work-related health risk – only then should business look to **minimise** its effects.

Minimising risks means:

- ▶ **substituting** the hazard with another of lesser risk – e.g. replacing a harmful substance with a less hazardous one
- ▶ **isolating** the risk – e.g. ensuring soundproofed cabs for machine operators to minimise noise exposure
- ▶ putting **engineering controls** in place – e.g. purchasing a saw with quality anti-vibration features
- ▶ implementing **administrative controls** – e.g. Safety Data Sheets available on site, making sure work schedules allow enough rest
- ▶ using PPE to **minimise any effects**, such as the right class of ear protection.

**Note: PPE should never be the first or only option to protect health.**

### Health checks

Annual health checks can be a good way to stay on top of health hazards and make sure nothing is affecting your workers’ health or their ability to do their jobs safely.

An occupational health specialist can create a health monitoring system that matches testing to known or foreseeable health risks appropriate for the work you do – e.g. eyesight, hearing, cholesterol, lung function and grip strength tests.

It’s also a good idea to give new workers a health check to make sure they have no health issues that might increase their chances of getting injured – e.g. testing a tree faller’s eyesight and hearing.

### Substances hazardous to health

▶ 3

WorkSafe is in the process of developing Safe Work Instruments to help businesses understand their responsibilities for managing risk related to a number of hazardous chemicals (Section 31 of the General Risk regulations).

Until that happens, businesses need to treat hazardous substances as they would any other risk.

As far as keeping workers – and anyone else – safe around hazardous substances businesses must:

- ▶ apply safe use, handling and storage practices
- ▶ provide information, training, instruction or supervision
- ▶ monitor the health of workers and the conditions at the workplace to prevent illness.

**Minimise exposure:** Always aim to keep exposure to substances as low as possible by ensuring equipment used is fit for purpose and in good working order.

Have Safety Data Sheets available and make sure workers understand the safety requirements and guidance before they start the job. Make sure the correct PPE is worn and well maintained. Plan the work to minimise inhalation or contact with the skin.

Workers using or handling substances should be competent to do the work. Putting them through a [Growsafe Introductory](#) course will help. Supervisors of such operations should hold the Advanced Certificate or have access (immediately by phone) to someone with the certificate, should they need advice.

**Ask an expert:** If you are concerned about working with a particular substance it’s a good idea to get professional advice on exposure monitoring to make sure you are managing the risks appropriately.

### Workplace exposure standards and monitoring

If you are interested in learning more about Workplace Exposure Standards and monitoring visit [WorkSafe’s website](#).



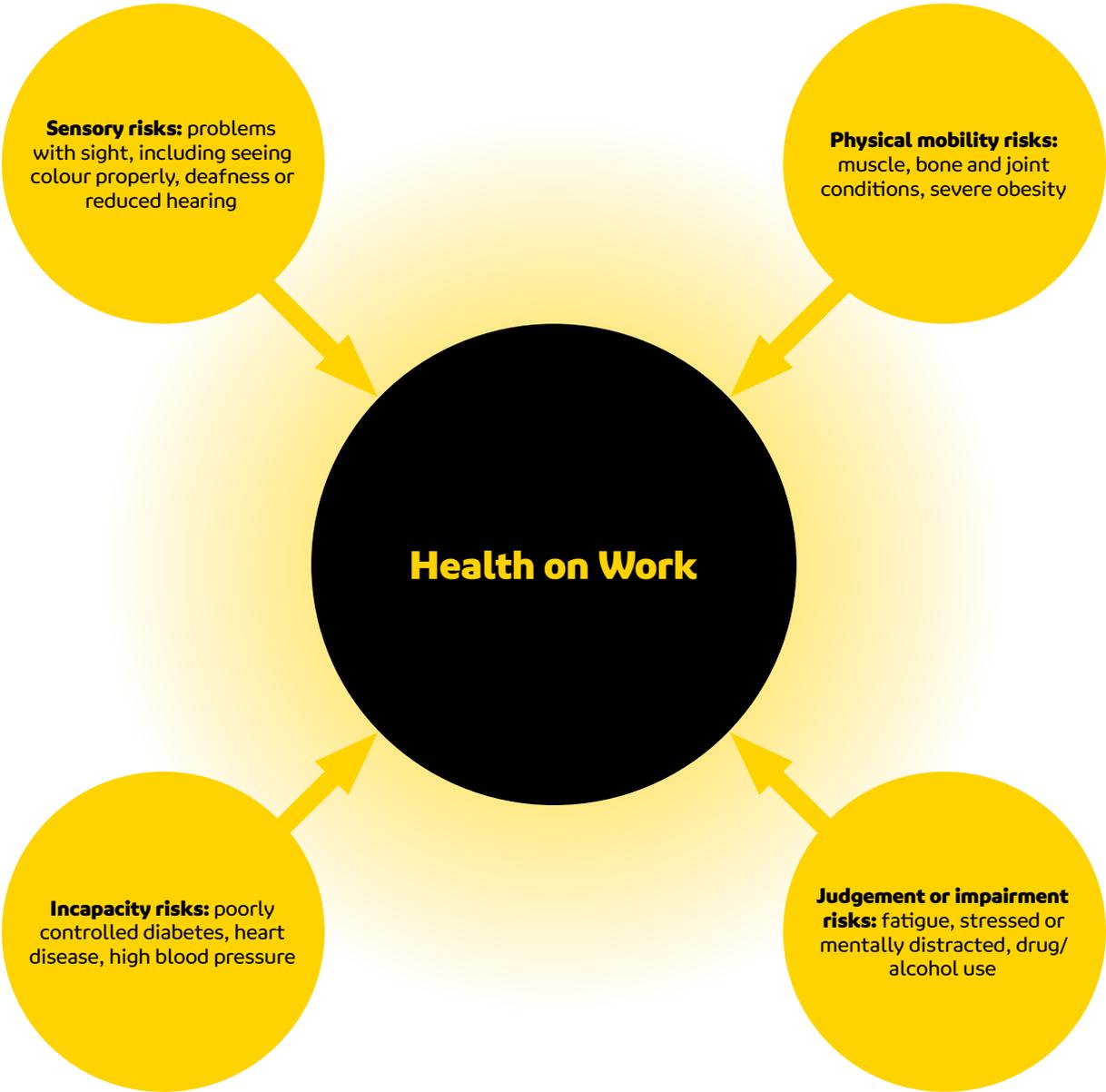
**Manage risk first:** Like using PPE, never rely on monitoring exposure standards and health checks to manage work-related health risks. Focus on applying and monitoring the agreed risk management controls. Providing a risk-free workplace must always be the first priority.

## The impact of health on work

Just as work can impact on our health, our personal health (or “impairments”) can impact on our safety at work. These could be physical impairments (e.g. hearing or sight loss, diabetes or joint conditions) or mental impairments (e.g. depression, stress). Impairment can also be brought on by not getting enough rest breaks, having poor sleep, or using alcohol and other drugs.

Under health and safety law, a worker has a responsibility to tell their employer if they have a particular health issue (e.g. they are highly allergic to wasp stings) that could impact on their, or other people’s, ability to work safely.

Their employer then has a responsibility to ensure that risk is handled appropriately (e.g. an epipen – epinephrine auto-injector – is kept on site and first aiders in the crew know how to use it).



## Managing health-on-work risks

Sometimes it's hard to know if a health condition developed because of work or because of things the worker did after hours.

It can be frustrating for a business to feel it has a responsibility to deal with issues it has no direct control over. For workers, also, it can feel like their employer is getting involved in their private issues – e.g. by asking them to drink less or get more sleep.

### A business' responsibility

Managing the impact of health on work is about ensuring everyone is **fit for work**.

Businesses have a duty to make sure their workers are always safe while at work. Because many individual health conditions can have a direct effect on worker safety, making sure all employees are fit for work is very much a business' responsibility.

### A worker's responsibility

The law also makes it clear that workers must take reasonable care of their own health and safety.

They must follow all reasonable instructions and must make sure their work won't harm others. They are responsible for ensuring they aren't impaired while at work (e.g. that they aren't affected by drugs and alcohol and have had enough rest before coming on shift).

They are also responsible for telling their employer if they have a health condition that could impact on workplace safety.

## Some individual health conditions that can be managed

### Fatigue

Fatigue is more than just tiredness after a long day at work, and it can be prevented.

Workers must be allowed enough time between work shifts to rest properly and [must be given reasonable chances to rest and refresh at work](#). This includes the legal entitlement (under the Employment Relations Act) for paid rest breaks.

It's good practice for a business to set clear expectations around rest breaks and their importance to manage fatigue. While there are no specific rules for how long, or when, rest and meal breaks should be, they need to be long enough and frequent enough for a worker to recharge (rest, eat and drink) and take care of personal matters.

That's especially important when the work is physically and/or mentally demanding, or the environment is challenging, such as when working on steep terrain or in very hot or cold weather.

Remember, it's in the best interests of a business to allow workers to take breaks so they are rested, and are more productive and safer.

Educating workers about good [nutrition and hydration](#) is also a good way to manage fatigue.

### Behaviour

Businesses must control behaviours at work that could impact on health and safety.

The Health and Safety at Work Act's definition of hazardous behaviour reads: "Hazard includes a person's behaviour where that behaviour has the potential to cause death, injury, or illness to a person (whether or not that behaviour results from physical or mental fatigue, drugs, alcohol, traumatic shock, or another temporary condition that affects a person's behaviour)."

### Stress

Workers can get stressed if they feel they have much work to do, not enough involvement in making decisions, there's poor communication, harassment or poor working relationships.

They may also be dealing with stress from outside of work, which could impact on their ability to work productively and/or cope with work-related stress.

In addition to mental health problems, workers suffering from ongoing stress can develop serious physical health problems such as cardiovascular disease (leading to heart attacks).

Some businesses may think stressed workers just need to "harden up" and that it's not their role to help them deal with non-work-related stress. However, mental ill-health conditions such as stress – whether caused by work-related factors or not – are the biggest reason people take time off (absenteeism), and the issue is predicted to get worse.

Good work planning and organisation, and support from management, can help workers cope better even if their stress is created by non-work pressures.

## Promoting wellbeing

WorkSafe is also encouraging businesses to promote health and wellbeing, e.g. helping them learn more about healthy eating, help to quit smoking, get more exercise, and reduce stress.

Read about [WorkSafe's approach to work-related health](#).

## Education

Some industry training is available to help forestry operators manage factors that affect work-related health.

This includes four unit standards – one aimed at forestry workers and the other three at log truck drivers.

- ▶ [Demonstrate knowledge of factors that affect the performance of forestry workers](#) (22994)
- ▶ [Demonstrate knowledge of stress, health and fatigue for driving](#) (1734)
- ▶ [Demonstrate knowledge of health factors affecting the performance of commercial road transport drivers](#) (26558)
- ▶ [Demonstrate knowledge of fatigue management, work time, and driver logbook requirements](#) (24089)

See [www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz) or a Competenz Regional Account Manager for more information on these unit standards.



## About this book

This resource is intended as guidance only to help people working in forestry manage their work-related health responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

## About Safetree

Safetree is a source of information for New Zealand's forestry industry to find the guidance they need to do their jobs without injury or ill health.

Safetree provides videos, printable downloads and other resources to help people at all levels of the industry. Whatever the task, and whatever their position in the crew, the message is always to do the job right, do it safely, every single time.

Safetree is managed by the Forestry Industry Safety Council (FISC) and has been developed with the support of:

- ▶ **Forest Owners Association** – [www.nzfoa.org.nz](http://www.nzfoa.org.nz)
- ▶ **Forestry Industry Contractors Association** – [www.fica.org.nz](http://www.fica.org.nz)
- ▶ **New Zealand Farm Forestry Association** – [www.nzffa.org.nz](http://www.nzffa.org.nz)
- ▶ **ACC** – [www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz)
- ▶ **Council of Trade Unions** – [www.union.org.nz](http://www.union.org.nz)
- ▶ **WorkSafe NZ** – [www.worksafe.govt.nz](http://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

### For more:

Go to [www.safetree.nz](http://www.safetree.nz) to register for updates and to find other resources to stay safe on the job.

For more on HSWA, go to the WorkSafe site: [www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/hswa](http://www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/hswa)

For more on work-related health, including guidance and tools:  
[www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/information-guidance/work-related-health](http://www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/information-guidance/work-related-health)

▶ 7



**An introduction  
to Safetree™**

Join us on facebook



[www.facebook.com/safetreenz](http://www.facebook.com/safetreenz)