

4.12 Office Health and Safety

The company has both a legal and moral responsibility to its employees, YP's, visitors, etc to ensure that all office environments within the company comply with current laws and are safe and comfortable places to work.

The office environment, although it generally does not present a high risk of injury it does contain a number of hazards which must be adequately controlled. Issues focus mainly on housekeeping, electrical hazards, storage of records or files, use of computers and display screen equipment for extended periods of time etc. This section is relevant to Head Office, as well as the Service.

This section will cover all elements of office safety and provide advice and guidance on how to identify employees who may be exposed to hazards. It will also provide information on how best to control employees' exposure to the hazards identified.

It should also be emphasised that in addition to the employer's responsibility to staff health and well being in the office, they too have a responsibility to ensure that the environment in which they work is kept safe, clean and tidy for themselves and their colleagues.

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1. Legal Requirements

All new employees to be made aware of the following:

1. The Health & Safety Law posters - posted in the offices at each site. It is their responsibility to read the posters and bring up any queries they may have with their team leaders or managers.
2. Employers' Liability Insurance certificate - also posted in the offices at each home.

2. Accident Reporting

With regard to accidents in the office, all staff should know how to deal with accidents, where first aid kits are kept and who are the qualified first aiders at each home office. See Guidance in **Accidents Procedure**.

3. Office Space, Ventilation and Light

3.1 General housekeeping

All staff are responsible for maintaining reasonable standards of housekeeping. Good housekeeping is the basis of a good health and safety environment. Follow these procedures to help cut down on accidents:

- Keep floors clean and dry to reduce slippage;
- Ensure that corridors, passages and escape routes are kept free of obstruction;
- All electrical appliances should be switched off and disconnected when not in use - particularly at night;

- When placing objects on shelves make sure that they are properly stacked.

Do not store often used objects in difficult to access places. All staff have a duty of care to themselves and others therefore should notify of hazards and discuss health and safety directly with their line manager as soon as they arise. Prompt remedial action should be taken and a response given.

If action is not taken staff should formally report the matter in writing to their manager.

Any room to be used as an office/workroom should have enough free space to allow people to move about with ease. The minimum cubic space requirement shall not be less than 11 cubic metres per person and only the first 3m of height should be included within the calculation.

Workplaces need to be adequately ventilated. Fresh, clean air should be drawn in from a source outside the workplace and be circulated through the workplace.

Ventilation should also remove and dilute warm, humid air and provide air movement which gives a sense of freshness without causing draughts. Windows or other openings may provide sufficient ventilation but where necessary, mechanical ventilation should be provided in the form of fans or portable/fixed air conditioning units.

Workplaces such as offices should have a normal minimum room temperature of 16 degrees Celsius.

Lighting should be sufficient to enable people to work and move about safely providing a minimum of 500 Lux at desk top height, if necessary, background lighting provided by windows and ceiling lights may be supplemented by the use of desk lamps for individual workstations and at places of particular risk, such as crossing points on circulation routes.

Lighting must be carefully considered to ensure shadows are not cast over work areas and that there is adequate natural or artificial lighting provided.

3.2 General Office Duties

There are a number of issues relating to office safety. One of the most important general issues is that the office should be kept tidy and the following should be ensured:

- Items must not be stored in walkways where they may present tripping hazards.
- Cables and leads from equipment must be carefully located. Ideally they should not cross walkways. Where it is necessary for cables to cross walkways, they should be suitably secured using heavy-duty tape or, ideally, specifically designed cable covers that in turn, should be secured.
- Items should be properly and safely stored. Filing cabinets should not be over-filled or over-loaded at the top – ideally they should have interlock devices to avoid more than one drawer being opened at any one time. Shelving or racking must be stacked safely. Boxes, for example, should not be stacked too high one on top of another.
- Items should not be stored underneath desks.
- Handling of heavy items of stock (e.g. bulk paper deliveries) or movement of equipment must be undertaken safely. Refer to the Manual Handling section.
- Safe practices should be adopted, for example not leaving drawers open or leaving bags in walkways.

3.3 Office Furniture and Equipment

All furniture (chairs, tables, desks, etc.) should be suited to the task and safe.

Staff should be shown how to use all office equipment (including photocopiers, fax machines, computers and printers, etc.) and how to obtain help if they have problems.

Fax machines and photocopiers should be situated in places in well ventilated areas where they do not cause unnecessary noise or fumes for the occupants of the office. Ideally, photocopiers should be located away from the main work area either in a separate room or in a very well ventilated area.

Workstations should be large enough, monitors should be free from glare and situated at the correct height. People should be able to leave workstations swiftly in an emergency. Each workstation should be provided with a suitable seat. Suitability of seating will depend upon what work activities are undertaken at the workstation. Chairs should be adjustable and offer adequate support to the lower back, swivel and be on rollers for ease of use. Footrests should be provided for workers who cannot place their feet flat on the floor.

Ideally workstations that may be used by a number of persons or where staff are likely to be seated for long periods should be adjustable, to allow the user to find the most comfortable position for them.

Staff should undertake a Risk Assessment of the workstation and be shown how to adjust computer workstations to make themselves more comfortable. A copy of the booklet "Working With VDU's" will be available at all homes/offices and staff should be made aware of its content through basic training.

If staff have any concerns relating to their office accommodation, they should report those through to the Manager

Notes for Users:

- Employers have a legal duty to provide a safe and healthy place for you to work. The workstation that you use must not cause you any health or safety problems (i.e. vision problems, headaches, physical problems etc).
- Each workstation has to be assessed with the user present.
- If a problem is identified then this will need to be rectified by the line manager.

These forms will be kept as a record of your assessment and you may be asked to repeat it from time to time.

You should complete a new assessment form if there are:

- Changes to equipment;
- Changes to your furniture;
- Increases in the time you spend operating your equipment;
- Any noticeable changes to your health;
- Major changes in your software.

This assessment includes your judgement of your workstation.

Do not be influenced by other users.

If you have any health problems which you consider may have been caused by using screen equipment, or which may be affected by using display screen equipment, you should inform your manager immediately. Such problems could include upper limb disorders (pains in fingers, wrists, arms, shoulder or back), eyestrain, signs of poor circulation, or any concerns you may have regarding your health.

If you have any difficulty in answering any of the questions ask your manager for assistance.

The Company will appoint competent electrical contractors to carry out any work on the electrical systems or appliances. All portable electrical equipment will be tested on regular basis and any new equipment that is purchased between these dates will have a thorough visual inspection carried out by the manager of the unit.

Procedure for conducting Visual Inspection on Portable Electrical Appliances:

- Ensure that the appliance is not connected to the mains before commencing the visual inspection;
- Check that equipment is in sound condition;
- Check for damage, such as cuts or abrasion, to the cable covering, cracked or bent plug;
- Check there are no joints, including taped joints in the cable;
- Check the outer covering of the cable is being gripped where it enters the plug or equipment;
- Check that the equipment has not been used in unsuitable conditions, for example, a dusty or damp area. Check that there is no damage to the outer covering of the equipment or loose screws;
- Check for signs of overheating such as burn marks or discoloration.

The above checks also apply to extension leads, associated plugs and sockets, faults should be reported to a Manager who must take steps to ensuring the equipment is not used until repaired or replaced. (If an item is taken out of service the Manager must enter the date of removal to the inventory)

Any problems with the office environment, furniture or equipment should be notified in writing either to their team leader or manager.

3.4 HQ office and home office staff

In addition to general office procedures as already outlined, in areas where staff are permanently office-based and work at their own computer for the majority of the day, the following requirements should be noted:

Any person using a computer as part of their work will need to carry out a Display Screen Assessment. This will include the following criteria.

- A screen image that is free from flicker;
- Brightness/contrast should be easily adjusted;
- A screen that is adjustable in angle and height;
- The screen should be free from glare and clean;
- The keyboard should be adjustable to allow a comfortable working position;
- The desk should be a suitable size for the work being carried out;
- The chair shall be an adjustable swivel chair suitable for the computer user;
- A footrest;
- There must be sufficient space to allow the user to change position and vary movements;
- Lighting must allow contrast between screen and background environment;

- Reflections and glare should be avoided and windows fitted with blinds where necessary;
- Cables will be kept tidy;
- Sufficient electrical sockets shall be available to prevent overloading and unnecessary trailing cables.

3.5 Repetitive strain injury

Workers spending any time typing on computer keyboards should be alert for the symptoms and aim to take regular breaks before the following symptoms arise:

- Aches and pains in wrists, arms, shoulders or neck;
- Swelling, tenderness, pins and needles, numbness and muscle spasm.

If any of these symptoms occur they must be reported to the Manager immediately.

Corrective measures may be as simple as taking regular breaks, varying duties, or even adjusting chair/work station. If symptoms persist a visit to a doctor will be necessary. For further guidance see HSE guide INDG 36 (rev4)

3.6 Employees Responsibilities

An employee should take regular rest. These breaks should include getting out of the chair to aid circulation;

- Have an eye test and wear glasses if required for display screen work;
- Rest eyes frequently, blink or look into the distance;
- Ensure that their chair is properly adjusted and that their working position/posture is correct;
- Report any concerns to management immediately.

3.7 Welfare Facilities

Suitable and sufficient sanitary conveniences and washing facilities shall be provided at readily accessible places.

An adequate supply of wholesome drinking water with suitable cups should be provided. Water should be provided in refillable enclosed containers where it cannot be obtained from a mains supply.

Adequate, suitable and secure space will be provided to store worker's own clothing.

Suitable, sufficient and readily accessible rest facilities should be provided. Rest rooms should be large enough and have sufficient seats and tables for the number of workers likely to use them at any one time along with Smoke Free zones.

3.8 Security

- a. At the end of the working day the last person in the office will complete a sweep of the building ensuring that all windows and doors are secure.
- b. All employees are responsible for ensuring that their desks are clear with all sensitive information securely filed.
- c. All computers users must securely log out of the system and switch off the device to avoid

unauthorised access to information

- d. Where the office has a burglar, alarm fitted these should be activated whenever the building is unoccupied.

Revision History

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