

4.17 Display Screen Equipment

Scope of this chapter

The company accepts its duty to comply with the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 implement as amended require employers to minimise the risks in VDU work by ensuring that workplaces and jobs are well designed.

Staff are given access to all information that identifies areas of risk. Staff will be given the necessary training and health and safety induction to manage such risk.

Ensure workstations meet minimum requirements

These requirements are good features that should normally be found in a workstation, such as adjustable chairs and suitable lighting. They are set out in a schedule to the Regulations, covering screens, keyboards, desks, chairs, the work environment and software. All workstations covered by the Regulations now have to comply, to the extent necessary for the health and safety of workers.

Plan work so there are breaks or changes of activity

As the need for breaks depends on the nature and intensity of the work, the Regulations require breaks or changes of activity but do not specify their timing or length. However the guidance on the Regulations explains general principles, for example short, frequent breaks are better than longer, less frequent ones. Ideally the individual should have some discretion over when to take breaks.

On request arrange eye tests, and provide spectacles if special ones are needed

Employees covered by the Regulations can ask their employer to provide and pay for an eye and eyesight test. This is a test by an optometrist or doctor. There is also an entitlement to further tests at regular intervals; the optometrist doing the first test can recommend when the next should be. Employers only have to pay for spectacles if special ones (for example, prescribed for the distance at which the screen is viewed) are needed and normal ones cannot be used.

Provide health and safety training and information

Employers have to provide training, to make sure employees can use their VDU and workstation safely, and know how to make best use of it to avoid health problems, for example by adjusting the chair.

Information should also be provided about VDU health and safety. This should include general background information - (this could be done by ensuring staff have accessed this information contained in this section of the policy) or giving them copies. It should also cover more specific details of the steps taken by the employer to comply with the Regulations, such as the action taken to reduce risks and the arrangements for breaks.

Making adjustments to suit your needs

Make full use of the equipment provided, and adjust it to get the best from it and to avoid potential health problems. If the Regulations apply to you, your employer should cover these things in training. If the Regulations don't apply, it is still worth setting up your workstation properly, to be as comfortable as possible.

Here are some practical tips:

Getting comfortable

- Adjust your chair and VDU to find the most comfortable position for your work. As a broad guide, your forearms should be approximately horizontal and your eyes the same height as the top of the VDU;
- Make sure you have enough work space to take whatever documents or other equipment you need;
- Try different arrangements of keyboard, screen, mouse and documents to find the best arrangement for you. A document holder may help you avoid awkward neck and eye movements;
- Arrange your desk and VDU to avoid glare, or bright reflections on the screen. This will be easiest if neither you nor the screen is directly facing windows or bright lights. Adjust curtains or blinds to prevent unwanted light;
- Make sure there is space under your desk to move your legs freely. Move any obstacles such as boxes or equipment;
- Avoid excess pressure from the edge of your seat on the backs of your legs and knees. A footrest may be helpful, particularly for smaller users.

Keying in

Adjust your keyboard to get a good keying position. A space in front of the keyboard is sometimes helpful for resting the hands and wrists when not keying.

Try to keep your wrists straight when keying. Keep a soft touch on the keys and don't overstretch your fingers. Good keyboard technique is important.



Reading the screen

Using a mouse

- Position the mouse within easy reach, so it can be used with the wrist straight. Sit upright and close to the desk, so you don't have to work with your mouse arm stretched. Move the keyboard out of the way if it is not being used;
- Support your forearm on the desk, and don't grip the mouse too tightly;
- Rest your fingers lightly on the buttons and do not press them hard.

Reading the screen

- Adjust the brightness and contrast controls on the screen to suit lighting conditions in the room;
- Make sure the screen surface is clean;
- In setting up software, choose options giving text that is large enough to read easily on your screen, when you are sitting in a normal, comfortable working position. Select colours that are easy on the eye (avoid red text on a blue background, or vice-versa);
- Individual characters on the screen should be sharply focused and should not flicker or move. If they do, the VDU may need servicing or adjustment.

Posture and breaks

- Don't sit in the same position for long periods. Make sure you change your posture as often as practicable. Some movement is desirable, but avoid repeated stretching to reach things you need (if this happens a lot, rearrange your workstation);
- Most jobs provide opportunities to take a break from the screen, e.g. to do filing or photocopying. Make use of them. If there are no such natural breaks in your job, your employer should plan for you to have rest breaks. Frequent short breaks are better than fewer long ones.

What should I do if I have any problems?

- If you are a VDU user and think you have health problems connected with your work, it's best to talk to your manager or safety representative or the Health and safety officer first. The company have a duty to consult their employees or employee representatives on health and safety issues. The company encourage early reporting of health problems, to both help sufferers obtain treatment they need, and help them return to work.

If this doesn't help, VDU users and employers can get advice from the relevant authority:

For VDU work in an office, shop or hotel: contact the Environmental Health Department at your local council.

For other premises (and government offices): contact your nearest local office of the Health and Safety Executive, as listed in the telephone directory.

More information and advice

The Health and Safety executive has published a guidance document INDG36(rev4) entitled Working with display screen equipment (DSE) - A brief guide and a copy can be downloaded free from their website at www.hse.gov.uk

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