



ASSURANCE CONSTRUCTION & SERVICES

## **OFFICE SAFETY SAFE WORK PRACTICES**

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All members of the staff are reminded that they too have a legal obligation to ensure that they do not work or conduct themselves in a way which will endanger the health and safety of themselves or anyone else. The following points are intended to draw attention to the hazards and dangers which are commonly found in offices and to give some guidance on how accidents can be prevented.

### **ASSESSMENT OF RISK**

Employers are required to carry out risk assessments on all hazards which may pose a significant risk.

### **FALLS & HOUSEKEEPING**

- The majority of accidents in an office are due to falls. Falls generally result from untidiness in the working environment such as leaving equipment and files lying on the floor, trailing flexes such as telephone wires or electrical cables, worn or damaged floor coverings, stair treads and risers, spilt liquids and from standing on chairs or boxes instead of using proper steps and ladders.
- Staff also have a duty to ensure that, if in the course of their work they will have to use steps or ladders to reach files stored on the upper shelves of filing racks, they have available for use a sensible pair of shoes and do not attempt to climb up in unsuitable shoes.

### **LIFTING AND CARRYING**

- If the load is on the floor or low down always bend your legs and lift with the back straight. Do not attempt to lift or carry too much at a time. If moving heavy loads about for any distance, always use a trolley to avoid putting undue strain on the back.
- Do not attempt to carry more than you can comfortably manage. Do not carry so much that you cannot see where you are going. Be especially careful when negotiating stairs while carrying things. Always use the handrail and don't carry so much that you are unable to do so.
- Do not place or leave any objects in passages or on stairs which could cause someone else who is carrying something to walk into or fall over them. Get help.

### **WALKING**

- It is essential that staff obey the golden rule - 'WALK - DON'T RUN!' Running can cause an accident to yourself or to someone else. Be especially careful on stairs. Ensure that you only take one step at a time and hold onto the railing. Pay special attention if you suspect that the floors have just been polished and may still be slippery. If you find a floor surface that is slippery report it as a hazard and warn other staff.
- Be particularly careful with swing doors, especially heavy entrance doors. Do not follow someone else too closely who may not be aware of your presence and let the door swing into you. Always ensure that there is nobody following you before releasing a swing door behind you. Pay special attention to any member of the public or child in the vicinity of a swing door as they may not be as aware of the potential danger as you are.
- If you discover worn surfaces or coverings on the floor or stairs, obstacles placed in walkways or passages, or trailing wires or cables, report them to your Supervisor or the Safety Department.

### **OFFICE EQUIPMENT**

- Generally normal office equipment is not in itself dangerous, provided it is used sensibly and as intended.
- Filing cabinets can be very heavy when full, so to avoid overturning, only one drawer at a time should be opened and drawers should always be closed when not in use. Try to spread the load evenly between the drawers and



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preferably to put more into the lower drawers than the top as this helps to prevent overturning. Filing cabinets should be positioned so there is ample room available when the drawers are fully opened, both for working space at the cabinet and for passing by.

- Nothing should be stored on top of high filing racks or without adequate support at the ends. Storing items on the top of a rack makes them too difficult and dangerous to retrieve, even using steps. Heavy objects such as bricks or blocks should not be placed on racks, and particularly not on the higher shelves or on the top of racks, to keep files upright or to act as end stops because of the obvious danger of their falling off onto someone. Similarly racks should never be moved while loaded or with loose objects on the shelves or top of the racks. Wooden furniture which is damaged or splintered should be reported. Be particularly careful with metal furniture which may have sharp edges on shelves or drawers.

### MACHINES

- Most offices contain electrically operated machines and the attendant electrical wiring and supply. Always ensure they are operating correctly. If there is any reason to think that a machine is not operating properly, disconnect it and do not use it until it has been checked and serviced. Always switch off electrical machines when not in use and disconnect before leaving the office for any length of time and especially at lunchtime or in the evening.
- If you are expected to use or carry out routine servicing on a machine, even just cleaning it out, make sure you fully understand how to operate it and carry out any servicing routine. If chemicals or dyes are involved, always use protective clothing. Never attempt to carry out repairs to a machine yourself and only carry out routine servicing to a machine if you have been properly trained to do so.

### OBSTRUCTIONS

- General tidiness in the office is essential to ensure safety and efficiency as well as safeguarding the visual appearance of the office. All floors, passageways, walkways, stairs and other access routes must be kept clear of goods and equipment.

### FIRE

- Many fires in offices occur out of hours but they are often the result of human error during working hours.
- Keep clothing, towels, etc. away from heaters including storage heaters. The build-up of heat through lack of ventilation can cause a fire.
- Switch off all electric appliances after use.
- Keep all flammable liquids in tightly closed containers.
- Our company operates a No Smoking Policy throughout its premises. The only exceptions are the designated smoking areas outside the building.
- Make sure that you know what to do if you discover a fire and also when the fire alarm is sounded. Instructions on these points are displayed throughout the office.
- Familiarize yourself with the position of the fire extinguishers for your office and make sure that you know how to use them. Do not cover up extinguishers or move them to hold doors open.
- Keep all fire exits free from obstructions at all times.
- Fire doors, marked by "FIRE DOOR KEEP SHUT" signs are always fitted with self-closing devices. On no account should these doors be propped open. Their function is to hold back smoke and hot gases in the event of a fire in order that escape routes may be protected.

### HORSEPLAY

The playing of practical jokes and horseplay is not only dangerous but is a violation of the workplace harassment policy. Think twice before you do anything which may cause injury to persons or damage property. It is also an offence and a breach of the safety rules to damage or misuse anything provided for health and safety.



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### ACCIDENTS

- All accidents, no matter how minor, should be recorded on an Accident Form kept in your Department's copy of the safety manual. If you are unable to find a copy of the Accident Form in your Department consult your supervisor or the Safety Department.
- If you require first aid you must report to one of the trained first aid personnel. Lists of all the trained first aid personnel are located throughout the office. It is the responsibility of all personnel to familiarize themselves with these lists.

### TRAINING

Your employer has a duty to train all staff in the use of equipment and the day-to-day conduct of work. In the office environment this includes specific training in the use of office electronics, the ergonomics of office work and the correct way to lift and carry awkward loads. Training in the use of fire equipment and emergency procedures is also mandatory.

This document will apply to all employees of our company that work in an office environment.

### REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY – WHAT IS IT?

Overuse of the muscles through repeated movements can put stress on your body causing a Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). Other names for RSI include Cumulative Trauma Disorder and Repetitive Motion Injury.

Many office jobs require that we perform repetitive motions to fulfill our duties. For this reason, RSIs are the most common type of injury found in the office. Tendons are common sites of RSI pain and discomfort, but workers may also experience pain in other areas of the body depending on the tasks performed.

### SYMPTOMS OF RSIs

The first signs of an RSI may be subtle and mild, and the symptoms may appear long after performing the activity. For these reasons, people often ignore the slight aches and pains, but eventually these slight aches and pains can become serious problems if ignored. Symptoms may include:

- Dull aching
- Loss of sensation (numbness) in the fingers.
- Aches/pains which may be worse at night
- Tingling and burning sensations
- Swelling around the wrist/hand
- Dry, shiny palm
- 'Pins and Needles' discomfort
- Clumsiness (loss of ability to grasp items, impaired thumb and finger dexterity)
- Muscle weakness and fatigue
- Muscle spasm
- Joint restriction/loss of movement
- A 'crackling' feeling when swollen tendons are pressed tightly
- A cyst-like swelling or node, known as a ganglion, near a tendon or joint

### RISK FACTORS



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The risk factors closely associated with the development of an RSI are physical, psychological/organizational and environmental factors.

### PHYSICAL FACTORS

Factors such as force, posture and frequency/duration of work are associated with the likelihood of developing an RSI because they stress our joints and muscles.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL/ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Stress is an indirect cause. Our bodies' physical reaction to stress (tensing up certain muscles and paying little attention to proper posture and movement) can cause or aggravate an RSI.

### ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Some environmental factors may contribute to the possibility of developing an RSI while others simply reduce productivity (noise, temperature, and lighting).

### PREVENTATIVE MEASURES – WORK SMARTER AND SAFER

Since most office work is done sitting at a desk, it is important to adjust our chairs to make them as comfortable as possible. If you can do various jobs switch from time to time to avoid the repeat factor. Workers who do large amounts of data entry are very susceptible to RSI.

**Chair Height:** adjust the height of your chair so your thighs are horizontal and your knees are at right angles when you are seated.

**Seat Depth:** the space between the front edge of the seat and the back of your knees should be the span of two to three fingers. This will minimize pressure on the underside of your leg.

**Back Support:** adjust the lumbar support so it rests in the small of your back.

**Armrests:** while seated, bend your elbows to 90 degrees and relax the shoulders. If your armrests do not allow for this position, do not use them while keying or using the mouse. If armrests are too high or too low, have them removed or get a new chair without armrests.

### THINK

**Rest breaks:** avoid sitting for long periods. Move around; stretch your back, neck and shoulders at least every 10 minutes.

**Posture:** keep your feet flat on the floor (use a footrest if necessary) and lean into the backrest at all times. Keep your back in good alignment and your chin tucked in. This position should feel comfortable and natural.

**Convenience:** avoid overreaching. Keep items you use frequently close at hand.

**Tidy:** keep your work surface and underneath your desk free of clutter. Your legs should be allowed to move freely.

When positioning your computer's monitor, keyboard and mouse, location is everything.

- **Monitor Position:** place it directly in front of you when your head is in neutral position and your eyes are looking forward.
- **Screen Height:** monitor should be at eye level or just slightly below eye level



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- **Distance:** the right distance is the one at which you can easily read the screen without experiencing eyestrain (between 15-27 inches is comfortable for most users). If the recommended distance is too great for you to see clearly, it is better to increase the font size rather than bringing the monitor closer to you.

A few other points you may want to keep in mind about your monitor:

### GIVE YOUR EYES A BREAK

- Looking at a computer screen for extended periods of time can cause eyestrain. For a few seconds every hour, focus on something farther away (i.e.: a clock 20 ft. away).
- Tilt your monitor down if glare is noted on the screen. If you are tilting your head up to see the screen because of bifocal or trifocal glasses (even after setting the monitor height), you may want to consider computer-specific glasses.
- Eye strain can also be caused by uncorrected vision, have your eyes checked regularly.

### KEYBOARD AND MOUSE POSITIONING

- Keyboard: position your keyboard so your wrists are straight when elbows are 90 degrees.
- Mouse: position the mouse at the same height as the keyboard and keep it within easy reach.

### THINK

- **Relaxed:** holding a mouse and typing on a keyboard shouldn't take too much effort. A light grip on the mouse and a light key stroke will keep wrist pain to a minimum.
- **Straight:** try to keep the wrist relaxed and straight. Use a wrist/palm support for micro-breaks only; resting your hands or wrists on the support during keying and mouse usage can bend the wrist. Also, keep your elbows as close to the body as possible and move the mouse with the whole arm, initiating movement from the shoulder.

Accessories such as document holders, footrests and headsets are other tools that can be used to improve the ergonomics of your office.

### LAPTOP TIPS TO PREVENT AND REDUCE PAIN

- Make your laptop setup as close to the desktop ergonomic computer station setup as possible.
- Keep the wrists in the most natural wrist position that you can achieve.
- Rotate the screen so that bending of the neck is minimized.
- Tuck the chin in to rotate the head instead of bending the neck





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## OFFICE EXERCISES

Done frequently and properly, the following exercises can help relieve joint and muscle tension and offset injury.

### A few things to remember about doing exercises:

- If you are under medical treatment, please contact your physician before doing any of the following suggested exercises.
- Perform all exercises within your comfort zone, and breathe naturally.
- Stretches should be done slowly and smoothly. Do not bounce or strain. If you feel discomfort, **STOP**.

## Wrist/Forearm Stretches

1. Drop your arms and hands to your sides.  
Shake them out for a few seconds.



2. Sit on a chair with elbows on a table in front of you. Bring palms together as you slowly lower wrists to the table until you feel a stretch.



3. Straighten one arm in front of you, palm down. Using the hand of the other arm, slowly bend your hand down until you feel a stretch. To intensify the stretch, make a fist with the hand of the outstretched arm. Switch arms.



## Upper Back Stretch

- Extend both arms out in front of chest at shoulder height. Do not overextend the elbows.
- Interlock fingers, palms facing away from the body.
- Maintaining an upright posture, reach forward with the arms until you feel a stretch in the shoulder/upper back region. Hold for six to ten seconds.
- Raise and stretch both arms overhead, keeping arms extended and fingers interlocked. Keep stomach muscles tight to avoid arching the low back. Breathe naturally and hold for ten seconds.



## Neck Stretch

- Sitting up straight, draw the chin in gently.
- Gently and slowly bend your head towards your right shoulder until you feel a mild stretch on the left side of your neck.
- Hold for five seconds and repeat on the other side.



## Palming Your Eyes

- Cup your hands.
- While resting your elbows on a desk or table, cover your eyes with one hand and overlap with the other to ensure all light is blocked. Do not put direct pressure on the eyes.
- Breathe naturally as you hold this position for 30 seconds.
- Remove hands and open eyes slowly.





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