



OFFICE SAFETY

Office work can pose a number of hazards to your health and safety. These hazards are dangerous because they are hidden. This article will show you how to avoid slips, trips and falls as well as cut down excessive noise. You will learn about common problems of adjusting to your work area, fire safety and ergonomics. No matter what your title is or what type of work you do, this article will help you learn ways to working safer and smarter.

SLIP, TRIPS AND FALLS

Falls are the second most common type of job related accidents. Office workers sustain half of all fall injuries. With a little awareness, you can avoid serious injuries caused by falls.

■ SLIPS

Whenever possible stay off of wet floors. If you have to walk on a wet floor, you must:

- Slow down.
- Shorten your stride.
- Point your toes out slightly.
- Make wide turns.

Watch out for spills, leaks or drips. Clean up puddles or identify them with a chair or trashcan.

■ TRIPS

Always keep the workplace clean and clutter free. A piece of paper or pencil stepped on just right can be very dangerous.

Take extra care when walking from carpeted to smooth hard surfaces.

Follow these tips to avoid tripping hazards:

- Take your time and watch where you are going.
- Keep walkways clutter free.
- Never leave file cabinet drawers open.
- Secure loose carpeting and cut loose threads.
- Never run loose power cables across a walkway.
- Never run power cords under carpet.

■ FALLS

Always use a ladder or stepstool to reach an object over your head. Follow these rules:

- Lock the ladder into position.
- Never use the top two rungs.
- Whenever you place a ladder in front of a door, secure the door so no one can open it.
- Take it easy on stairways and use the handrail.
- Never leave objects on staircases.
- Report any injury to your supervisor immediately.

■ NOISE

Prolonged exposure to excessive noise can damage your hearing over a period of time. If you can't talk on the phone or carry on a conversation at your workstation in a normal voice, your work area is too noisy. Keep in mind that damage to your hearing is permanent. So don't take chances.

- Isolate loud machines from the general work area.
- Use sound-reducing screens.
- Use sound-reducing machine covers.
- Properly placed carpet and draperies can also reduce noise levels.

■ ERGONOMICS

Each working environment has its own physical challenges. What appears to be a harmless activity can have dangerous physical consequences. For instance, the simple action of using a keyboard can take a toll on your body when the work is repeated continuously and rapidly day after day.

SHIFTING TO NEUTRAL

Working in awkward positions increases your chance of injuring muscles, tendons, nerves or joints.

Following these tips can prevent injuries:

- Shift to neutral body positions.
- Periodically relax your arms, letting them hang by your side.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed, your neck straight and your elbows by your side.

Relax your back by aligning its three gentle curves:

- In at the neck
- Out in the chest
- In again at your lower back

Avoid slumped sitting positions, rounded shoulders; sway back or an overly straight, stiff posture.

Adjusting the height of your workstation or chair so that your hands are about two inches above or below your elbow.

Keeping commonly used items located within arm's reach.

■ LIFTING

If regular lifting is not a part of your job, you can be more vulnerable to back injuries than those who lift objects everyday.

- Use pushcart when moving heavy loads.
- Keep loads close to your body when you pick them up.
- Bend at the knees and hips and use your legs when lifting.
- Avoid twisting your back at the waist.
- Use your feet to pivot.

MINIMIZING STRESS AND STRAIN

Here are a few tips on how computer users can minimize daily stress and strain.

- Use a padded swivel chair.
- Position equipment carefully.
- Place the top of your video monitor at eye level.
- Keep wrists in a neutral position.
- Place the keyboard at elbow height and at a slight incline.
- Use wrist pads to support your wrists.
- Use a hard-copy holder.
- Reduce the glare on monitors.
- Use indirect lighting.
- Install diffusers on lights and use shades or blinds on windows.
- Exercise your eyes by periodically looking away from your work and focusing on something else.

■ MINI BREAKS

Take regular mini-breaks to minimize strain all over the body. Circling, shrugging, stretching and arching will help to increase your circulation and relieve tension. Varying your work routine also helps relieve tension.

FIRE SAFETY

The best way to fight fires is to prevent them. Good office housekeeping is the key. Trash should always be placed in appropriate containers and emptied daily.

For those who smoke, smoke only in designated areas and never leave a lit cigarette unattended.

Fires can result from:

- Overheated equipment
- Overloaded conductors
- Short circuits
- Damaged electrical cords

■ PREVENTING ELECTRICAL FIRES

To prevent electrical fires:

- Replace damaged cords or plugs.
- Keep cords away from heat and water.
- Never run cords under rugs.

- Never remove the third prong on a grounded plug.
- Avoid plugging too many cords into an electrical outlet.
- Use multi-outlet electrical strips with a build-in breaker
- Only use an extension cord if absolutely necessary. Be sure it is grounded and can safely handle the current it will be conducting.
- Always pull an electrical cord from an outlet by the plug and never by the cord.
- Electrical equipment requires special care:
- Never use equipment that is damaged.
- Take special care with home appliances such as coffee pots and radios.
- Make sure electrical equipment is cleaned regularly and always unplug it before cleaning.

■ CHEMICAL STORAGE

All workplace chemicals must be labeled, even copy toner:

- Check with your supervisor for a Materials Safety Data Sheet. The MSDS will provide you with product hazard information and first-aid procedures.
- Handle flammable chemicals with care.
- Isolate machines that generate fumes or heat.

FIRE IS FAST

There are a few things you should know if a fire does occur. Fire is fast! A small flame can ignite a whole room in just three minutes. Soaring temperatures can sear lungs and melt clothing. A relatively small fire can fill your workplace with thick, black, blinding smoke full of toxic vapors. Of all fire related deaths, carbon monoxide poisoning causes 75 percent.

You should have an Emergency Action Plan developed to protect you in case of a fire. An Emergency Action Plan states who is responsible for evacuation and the primary and secondary escape routes. Be sure you are familiar with the Emergency Action Plan. If a plan doesn't exist, help your employer develop one.

■ CLASSES OF FIRE

There are three common classes of fire:

CLASS A fires involve ordinary combustible materials like paper, wood, cloth, rubber, and plastics.

CLASS B fires involve flammable liquids such as gas, oil or grease.

CLASS C fires are usually located in or near energized electrical equipment.

Know where the fire extinguisher is located and learn how to effectively use on before an emergency occurs.

If a fire cannot be extinguished, go to the nearest exit, and evacuate. Don't forget, the last person out of a room must close the door to prevent the fire from spreading. In a multiple story building the stairwell will be your primary escape route.

Remember:

- Don't prop stairwell doors open.
- Work your way to lower levels.
- Never use the elevator.
- Go to a predetermined meeting place outside so that a head count can be taken.

If you become trapped:

- Don't panic.
- Look for another exit.
- Feel doors for heat with the back of your hand. If it's hot, don't open it.
- If you can't find an alternative way out, stay where you are.
- Use anything available to seal doors, windows and vents from smoke, heat and flames.
- If there is a phone, call the fire department and give your exact location.
- Stay low to avoid smoke and heat. Temperatures can be 90 F near the floor and 60 F at eye level.