

TDI

Safety @ Work
Division of Workers' Compensation



Office Safety



**Workplace
Program**



DISCLAIMER

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INTRODUCTION



Safety and health hazards are not limited to worksites that require heavy machinery and hard manual labor. Jobs where most tasks are completed while sitting in a chair in a climate-controlled building can also have a surprising number of hazards.

About 50,000 private-industry office and administrative workers in the United States suffer on-the-job injuries yearly, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The majority of these injuries result from one of two types of incidents classified by the BLS as either "falls, slips, and trips" or "overexertion and bodily reaction." These injuries may result from factors such as:

- Improperly designed workstations.
- Long hours of computer and mouse use.
- Poor lighting.
- Clutter.
- Slippery surfaces.
- Harmful indoor pollutants.
- Stress-related symptoms.
- Musculoskeletal strains.

This Office Safety Workplace Program aims to address these issues and provide tips to create a safer, healthier work environment.

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OFFICE SAFETY

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the science of designing the workplace to fit the worker, rather than forcing the worker to fit the workplace. Proper ergonomics can greatly reduce the risk of musculoskeletal disorders, and office-related injuries, as well as workers' health and well-being.

Many injuries caused by long hours, repetitive motions, or improper posture can result from ergonomically incorrect computer workstation setups. Common complaints include:

- Neck, back, and shoulder pain.
- Arms, wrist, and hand discomfort.
- Lower extremity issues.
- Eyestrain.
- General feelings of tension and irritability.

The key to comfort while using a computer is maintaining the body in a relaxed, neutral position. The ideal position involves having the arms hanging relaxed from the shoulders. When using a keyboard, arms should be bent at right angles at the elbow, with hands and wrists held in a straight line with forearms and elbows close to the body. The head should align with the body and slightly forward. To arrange a workstation ergonomically, several adjustments should be made:

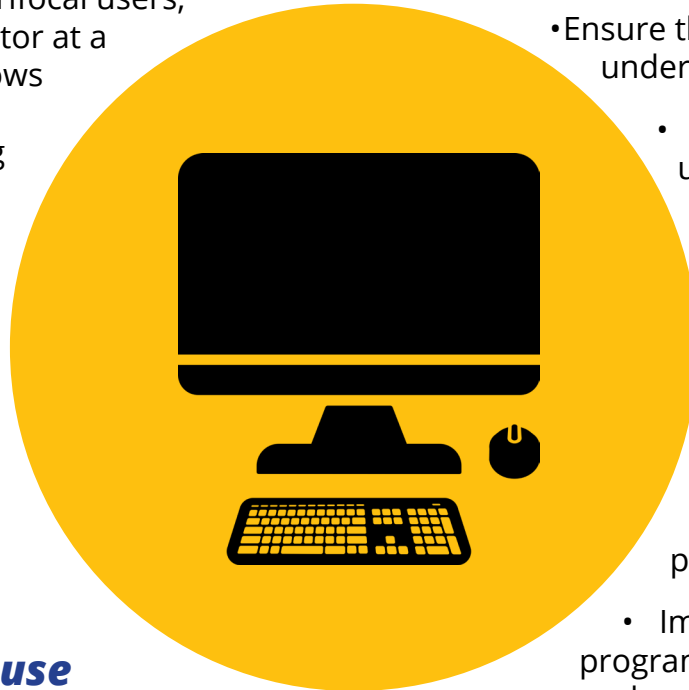


Chair adjustment:

- Adjust the chair's seat height so that your thighs are horizontal while your feet are flat on the floor.
- Adjust the seat pan depth to support the back with the chair backrest while keeping the back of the knees close to the front of the seat.
- Adjust the backrest up or down to support and fit the curve of your lower back.
- With arms at the sides and elbow joints at approximately 90 degrees, adjust the height and position of chair armrests to support the forearms.
- Use a footrest if the operator cannot rest their feet comfortably on the floor.

Monitor position:

- Position your screen directly in front of you at arm's length, with the top of the screen at or slightly below eye level to help prevent neck strain.
- For bifocal or trifocal users, place the monitor at a height that allows easy viewing without tipping the head back.
- Place reference documents on a document holder close to the screen and at the same distance from the eye.



- Consider using a standing desk for part of your day.
- Avoid sharp edges on the desk that can cause localized pressure injuries such as bruising, slowing of blood circulation, and nerve damage.
- Ensure there is adequate legroom under the desk.
- Keep frequently used items close to avoid overreaching.

Phone System:

- Use a headset while talking on the phone.
- Avoid cradling a phone between your head and shoulder to prevent neck strain
- Implement training programs on proper phone use and posture to reduce musculoskeletal issues.
- Use injury prevention software to monitor and improve ergonomics through real-time data and feedback..

Keyboard and mouse position:

- Adjust the keyboard height so your fingers rest on the keyboard home row when your arms are at your side and elbows at 90 degrees.
- Keep your wrists straight when typing or using the mouse.
- Keep the keyboard and mouse close to your body to avoid reaching.
- Use minimal force when striking keyboard keys.

Desk:

- Use an adjustable desk that allows your arms to rest comfortably at a 90-degree angle when typing.

Taking breaks and moving:

- Sitting for long periods can lead to health issues. Use these strategies:
- Move between different postures regularly.
- Stand up and stretch every hour.
- Take short walks during breaks.
- Perform simple desk exercises to reduce muscle tension.

Lighting

Poor lighting can lead to eye strain, headaches, and an increased risk of trips, slips, and falls. Apply these lighting strategies:

- Maximize natural light where possible.
- Position your monitor to avoid glare from windows or overhead lights. Use anti-glare filters on screens and adjust drapes or blinds as needed.
- Adjust screen brightness to match your surroundings.
- Maintain a proper contrast between the text and your computer background.
- Use adjustable task lighting for detailed work.



- Ensure all work areas are well-lit, including corridors and staircases.
- Consider using light-colored matte finish on walls, ceilings, and floors to reduce glare, as recommended by The Illuminating Engineering Society.
- Take mini-breaks to rest your eyes. These breaks do not mean stopping work but can involve changing to a different type of activity.

Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls

Slips, trips, and falls are among the most common office accidents, often resulting in serious injuries. To prevent these:

- Keep walkways clear of clutter and obstacles.
- Always close drawers completely after use.
- Secure loose carpeting or damaged flooring.
- Use non-slip mats in areas that may get wet.
- Clean spills immediately.
- Avoid running extension cords

- or cables across walkways. If unavoidable, use cable covers.
- Avoid excessive bending, twisting, and leaning backward while seated.
- Wear appropriate footwear with non-slip soles.
- Never stand on boxes or chairs, particularly rolling office chairs. If you need something at a higher level, use a fully opened stepladder placed on level, firm ground. Never exceed the highest safe standing level.
- Install a convex mirror in hallways or around blind corners to prevent collisions.

Struck By or Striking Objects

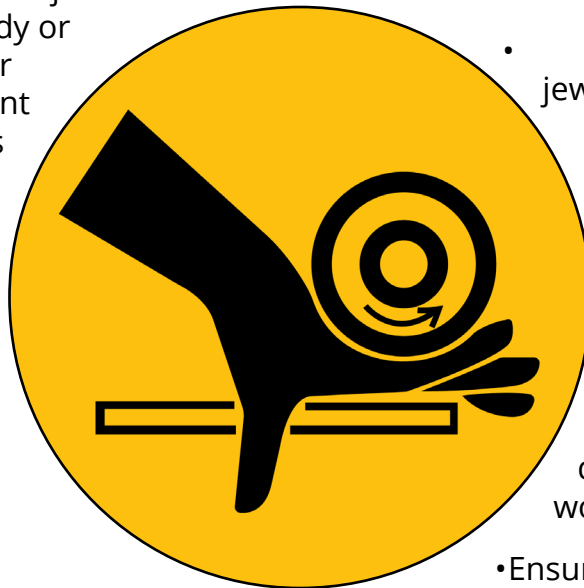
Struck by or striking objects is another common cause of office injuries. It involves colliding with stationary or moving objects in the workplace such as bumping into doors, desks, or other people. It also includes coming into contact with sharp objects such as office machines, staples, and cutting blades. To prevent struck-by or striking object injuries in the office:

- Maintain awareness of your surroundings while walking.
- Avoid carrying loads that obstruct your vision.
- Store heavy items on lower shelves to prevent falling objects.
- Secure office equipment and supplies to prevent sliding or falling.
- Use proper storage devices for sharp objects like pins and staples.
- Open doors slowly and carefully, especially in high-traffic areas.
- Organize workspaces to minimize reaching and bending.
- Use caution when operating or moving office equipment.
- Keep walkways and work areas clear of obstacles.
- Install safety features like drawer stops and cabinet anchors.
- Provide training on proper material handling and storage techniques.
- Encourage employees to report potential hazards promptly.
- Conduct regular safety inspections in the office.

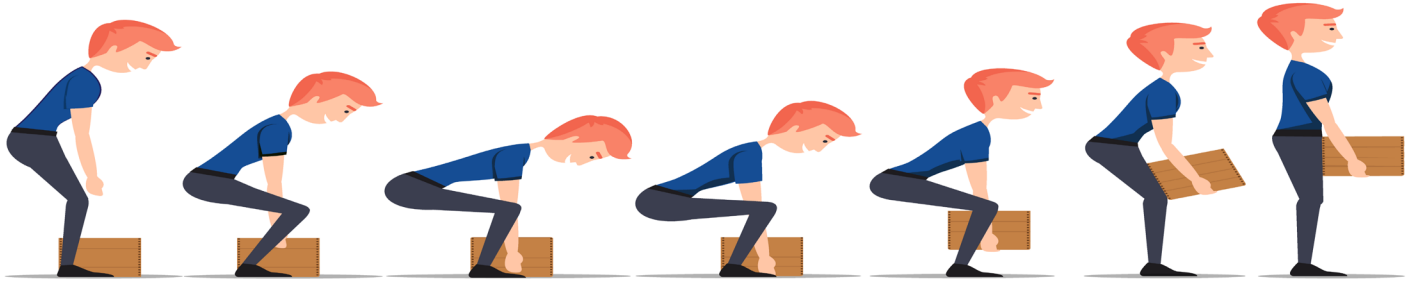
Caught In or Between Objects

Caught-in or caught-between injuries occur when a part of the body or clothing becomes trapped or entangled in office equipment or furniture. These incidents can result in minor to severe injuries and are often preventable with proper attention and safety practices. To prevent these injuries:

- Concentrate fully on tasks when operating office equipment.
- Stay aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Keep loose clothing, jewelry, and long hair secured.
- Use caution when closing drawers, doors, and windows.
- Operate paper cutters and other equipment with care.
- Avoid wearing dangling accessories in the workplace.
- Ensure proper training on equipment use and safety procedures.



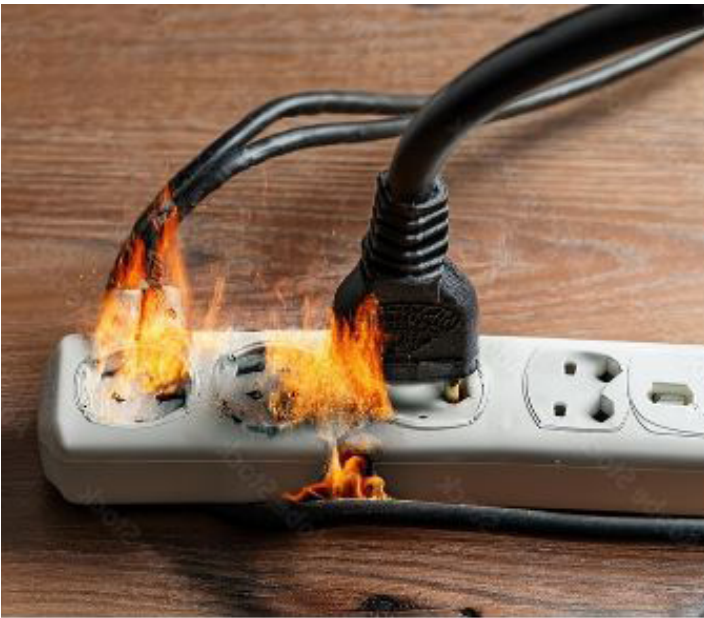
Lifting



While typical office jobs may not involve lifting heavy objects, even small, light, loads like boxes of computer paper or books can cause back, neck, or shoulder injuries if lifted incorrectly. Always use safe lifting principles:

- Assess whether a carton or load is too heavy to lift alone before you lift it. Consider how high it needs to be lifted and how far it needs to be carried. Ask for help when needed.
- When lifting, use these safer techniques:
 - Take a balanced stance with feet shoulder-width apart.
 - Squat close to the load when lifting from the floor.
 - Keep the back in a neutral position.
 - Tuck in the chin to maintain the neutral back line.
 - Grip the object with the whole hand, not just the fingers.
 - Draw the object close to the body with elbows close.
 - Lift by straightening the legs, using leg muscles rather than back muscles.
 - Tighten stomach muscles to support the back.
 - Maintain the neutral back position throughout the lift.
 - Avoid twisting while lifting; turn the whole body, feet first, when changing direction.
 - When lifting from a seated position:
 - » Stand and move the chair out of the way.
 - » Squat and stand to retrieve items from the floor.
- Arrange workspaces to avoid excessive twisting while lifting.
- Store materials at waist level whenever possible.
- Keep shelves shallow (12-18 inches) to reduce reaching forward.
- Break heavy loads into smaller, more manageable weights.
- Store frequently carried heavy objects closer to their point of use.
- Use hand trucks or carts to transport heavy objects.

Electrical Safety



Electrical hazards in offices can lead to fires and injuries. Follow these guidelines:

- Never overload outlets with too many devices.
- Keep liquids away from electrical equipment.
- Report any frayed cords or damaged equipment immediately.
- Use surge protectors for valuable equipment.
- Do not remove the grounding prong from a three-prong plug.

Storage

Material storage in offices is crucial for maintaining a safe and well-organized workspace. Improper storage practices can lead to hazards such as falling objects, reduced visibility, and increased fire risks. Good housekeeping practices and these tips can prevent storage hazards:

- Avoid storing items on top of lockers or file cabinets to prevent sliding.
- Use uniform box sizes in piles or stacks to maintain stability.
- Stack materials securely to prevent toppling.
- Place heavy objects on lower shelves for easy access.
- Position items to avoid reaching across other materials.
- Store materials inside cabinets and lockers when possible.



- Keep office equipment away from the edges of desks or tables.
- Maintain clear aisles, corners, and passageways.
- Use designated storage areas for their intended purpose only.
- Keep fire equipment, extinguishers, and exits unobstructed.
- Maintain at least 18 inches of clearance from sprinkler heads.

Noise

While offices typically do not reach dangerous noise levels, prolonged exposure to moderate noise can still impact employee well-being and performance. To reduce the risk of noise-related injuries, consider the following:

- Choose the quietest equipment available when selecting office machines.
- Maintain equipment regularly to prevent noise from loose or worn parts.
- Place noisy equipment in areas where it will cause less disruption.
- Install barrier walls or dividers to isolate noise.
- Use acoustic covers or housings to enclose loud equipment.
- Schedule noisy tasks during times that will least affect other office activities.

Indoor Air Quality



Poor indoor air quality can lead to health issues and decreased productivity. To maintain good air quality:

- Ensure proper ventilation by providing 20 cubic feet of outside air per minute per person in office

environments as recommended by the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Airconditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) guidelines.

- Regularly clean and maintain heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, including frequent filter changes.
- Position office equipment, especially photocopiers, away from workstations and in well-ventilated areas.
- Clean and maintain office equipment according to manufacturer recommendations to prevent emissions.
- Control humidity and temperature levels within ASHRAE-recommended ranges for optimal comfort.
- Take special precautions during renovations, new installments, or other activities that may increase air contaminants. These include paints, adhesives, sealants, furniture, carpeting, vinyl wall coverings, pesticide application, and heavy cleaning.
- Use low volatile organic compound (VOC) materials in office furnishings and supplies to prevent poor indoor air quality and related health effects.
- Monitor and address potential sources of chemical contaminants both inside and outside the office space.
- Ensure the ventilation system effectively captures and vents air pollutant sources to the outside.
- Implement a no-smoking policy in and around the office building.

Stress Management

Work-related stress can lead to various health problems and increase the risk of accidents. Implement these strategies:

- Encourage regular breaks and time away from screens.
- Promote work-life balance and discourage excessive overtime.
- Provide resources for stress management, such as meditation apps or on-site yoga classes.
- Foster open communication between employees and management about workload and job demands.

Training and Awareness

Regular training is crucial for maintaining a safe office environment:

- Conduct new-hire and annual safety training sessions for all employees.
- Provide specific training for new equipment or procedures.
- Encourage employees to report safety concerns without fear of reprisal.
- Regularly review and update safety procedures based on incident reports and employee feedback.

Emergency Preparedness

Ensuring that employees can respond quickly to unexpected situations and possible harm is crucial. In offices, fire safety is particularly important due to the rapid spread of smoke in open layouts and the presence of synthetic



materials that can emit toxic fumes when burned. Consider the following measures to enhance your emergency preparedness:

- Develop and regularly update an emergency action plan.
- Conduct regular fire drills and evacuation exercises.
- Clearly mark emergency exits and keep them unobstructed.
- Provide first aid kits and train employees in basic first aid.
- Learn and memorize all fire escape routes and alarm activation procedures
- Keep heat-generating equipment away from flammable materials.
- Switch off all electrical devices at the end of each workday
- Report and address any electrical equipment issues immediately

By implementing these strategies, offices can reduce the risk of workplace injuries and create a safer, more comfortable environment for all employees. Remember, safety is everyone's responsibility – from top management to every individual worker. By working together and staying watchful, you can help create a culture of safety that benefits everyone.



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