

Introduction/Overview

When most people think about job safety and hazards in the workplace, they think about manufacturing and warehouse work environments. Office hazards are either forgotten or ignored because many people think the hazards are minor when compared to the hazards of other work environments.

- Office work environments often have some of the same hazards of their associated manufacturing environments. If a fire or chemical spill occurs in manufacturing, people in both manufacturing and the office need to know how to evacuate. Office personnel are exposed to chemicals, lifting hazards, ergonomic issues, slip and trip hazards, and others.
- Office work environments are also required to comply with some of the same OSHA regulations as manufacturing work environments including training, written programs, and other OSHA requirements.
- Since office employees that work in manufacturing facilities may occasionally walk through production areas, they should also be familiar with the hazards of the manufacturing environment and the procedures to follow.

EXIT Strategies

Evacuation Procedures

In case of an emergency, such as a fire, chemical spill, or natural disaster that necessitates an evacuation, you will obviously need to know how to leave the building safely and where to meet.

- There are multiple emergency exits throughout the facility. Make a point of learning where each exit is located - not just the exits located near your workstation. You need to know how to evacuate the building? Walk safely toward the exits. Try to stay calm and help others near you who may be in a state of panic.
- In addition to knowing how to evacuate, you need to know what the fire alarm, or evacuation alarm, sounds like. When you hear the alarm, listen for instructions over the paging system.
- Once you safely evacuate the building, proceed directly toward the designated meeting area. A headcount will be taken to ensure all employees and visitors are safely out of the building. Do not go to your car or a smoking area, or leave the designated meeting area until told that it is safe to do so.
- It is important to keep the exits and access to exits (including hallways) clear. Some exit doors are not used for normal access to the building and are designated for emergency use only. These doors should never be blocked by anything including office furniture or boxes.
- Everyone must participate in evacuation drills. Some people think that drills do not apply to them when they are on the phone or working on an important project. The best way to learn about alarms, exits, meeting areas, and evacuation procedures is to participate in the drills.



Fire Prevention

If you discover a fire, the first thing you should do is notify others. The fire alarm can be activated from a number of places in the facility. You can also let others know of a fire by using the paging system, phoning, or yelling.

- Find out where fire extinguishers are located closest to your workstation.
- Retrieve the fire extinguisher so it is available when the trained fire responder arrives on the scene. You can put out the fire yourself only if you are trained.
- (Discuss your company's policy regarding who is allowed to assess a fire and evacuation procedures.)
- Call the Fire Department for all office fires. Even if you put the fire out, the Fire Department can help determine what caused the fire so another fire can possibly be prevented in the future.

In addition to being prepared if a fire does occur, it is even more important to focus on **fire prevention**.

- Remember the fire triangle. Fires need three things to start burning and stay burning—fuel, oxygen, and ignition source. If any one of these is missing, a fire will not exist. Each of the items described below will fit into the category of fuel or ignition source. Eliminate the hazards and you increase the possibility of eliminating fires.
- Flammable and combustible liquids, such as aerosols have a high potential for fires. They can be ignited by smoking, hot equipment, and static electricity. Make sure they are stored in appropriate “flammable cabinets” away from sources of ignition.
- The improper storage of combustible materials is another fuel source. Paper, boxes, unused furniture, and combustible cleaning chemicals, when stored near potential ignition sources such as hot equipment, electrical equipment, and smoking areas, may cause a fire. Store combustible materials in their proper locations, away from ignition sources.
- Damaged electrical cords with kinks, pinches, and torn insulation are fire hazards. They can overheat and ignite carpeting, paper, and boxes. Inspect electrical cords on a regular basis and replace them if they are damaged. Extension cords without internal fuses should not be used for extended periods of time. They are intended for short-term use only.
- Electrical outlets with damaged or missing face plates can be fire hazards. Circuit breaker boxes that are allowed to accumulate dust can also be fire hazards. Circuit breakers that continue to “trip” off should be reported to maintenance. This may be a sign of overloading or damage that could contribute to a future fire.
- Space heaters have always been a concern when used in the office. They are often located under desks and could be kicked over, igniting the rug or any other combustible materials such as papers or files that are stored nearby.
- Smoking is another potential source of ignition. Smoking is only allowed in designated areas that are away from combustible materials, flammable liquids, and other fuel sources.



Be careful with space heaters under a desk.

Chemical Spills

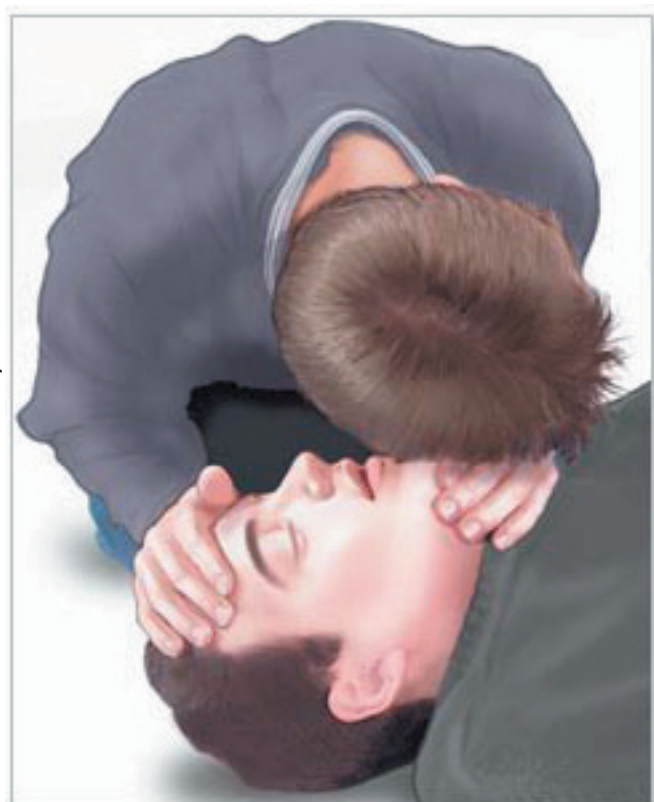
Most offices do not have many chemicals. Copy machine toner, liquid correction fluid, and cleaning chemicals are some of the most common chemicals that might be found in an office environment. The quantity of these chemicals is usually small. The hazard of chemicals seems minor until you consider that if a gallon jug of ammonia cleaning solution were spilled in your office it would probably make everyone run from the office coughing. Also, if your office is part of a manufacturing facility, chemicals in the manufacturing environment could spill and impact your office.

- Hazard Communication refers to your right to know about the hazards of the chemicals you work with and how to protect yourself from those hazards. Chemical containers have labels that identify the chemical, give physical and health hazards, basic personal protective equipment (PPE) recommendations, and special handling instructions. The chemical manufacturer also provides MSDSs that give even more detail about a chemical.
- If you discover a spilled chemical, evacuate the immediate area. Tell others in the area about the spill and have them get away. Unless you are trained, you should not attempt to clean up a spilled chemical.
- Notify trained spill response personnel.
- Keep others away from the spill area and wait for further instructions from the trained spill response personnel, who may tell you that the chemical is harmless and that it is OK to return to work while it is cleaned up, or they may tell you to evacuate the building.

Medical Emergencies

Medical emergencies can occur in the office just as they do on the manufacturing floor and in the warehouse. These emergencies can range from a sprain or broken bone caused by a fall to a heart attack or stroke.

- The company has a number of employees trained in first aid and CPR in all departments and on all shifts. At least one trained employee is on-site at all times.
- If the injury or illness is severe enough, do not hesitate to call an ambulance. If an employee is suffering from what appears to be a heart attack, call an ambulance and then call one of the in-house employees trained to administer CPR.
- First-aid kits are available with adequate supplies to treat injured employees.
- Bloodborne pathogens refer to viruses such as HIV and hepatitis B that are transferred through contact with infected blood. Do not touch another person's blood or potentially infected body fluids.



Natural Disasters

In an earthquake, seek protective cover under your desk or table or in a doorway. Once the earthquake has subsided, evacuate the building. Earthquakes may result in structural damage to the building. Employees should not re-enter the building until the “all-clear” signal has been given by the evacuation coordinator.

- If flood warnings are given, the building will be evacuated. If you are away from work when the flood warnings are given, do not attempt to get to work for any reason.
- In case of a windstorm, such as a tornado or hurricane, do not leave work. Move away from windows and doors, and move to an interior room or the designated shelter area.
- In case of snow or ice storms, you will be released from work if there is time for you to get home safely. If not, you will be directed to seek shelter at work.

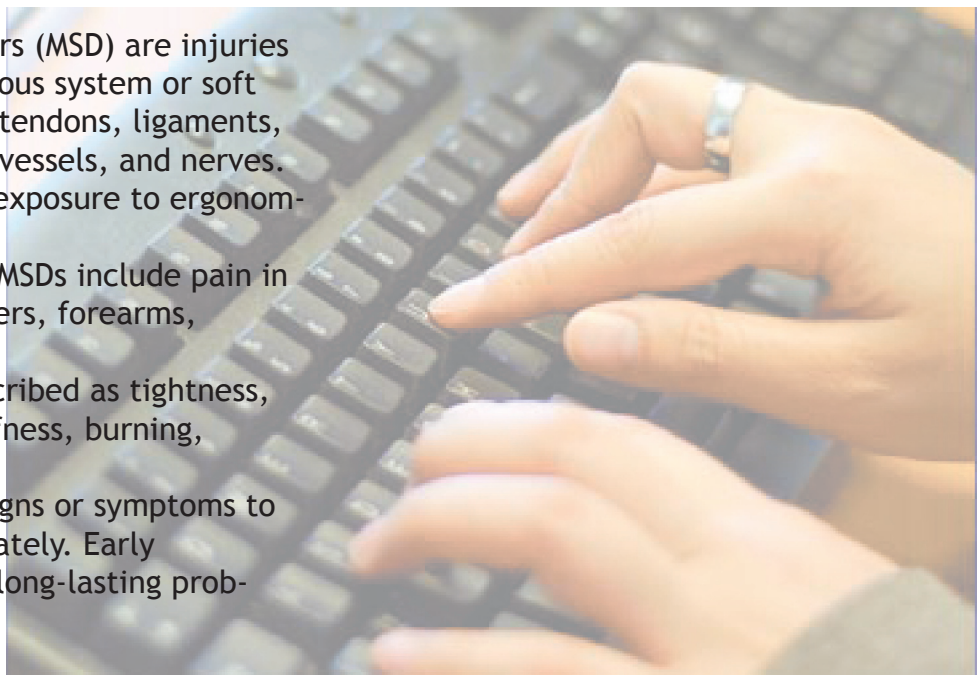
Ergonomics

Office workers are primarily exposed to the ergonomic risk factor of “repetitive” motions resulting from the repetitive nature of keyboarding and using a mouse.

- Force is a risk factor we are exposed to if we constantly lift, push, and pull objects.
- An awkward posture is another risk factor that many office workers are exposed to. Examples include extending arms to type, hunching shoulders, and leaning forward to get closer to the computer screen.
- Office workers are not likely to be exposed to contact stress, which occurs when we use our hand as a hammer or when we lean against solid objects for long periods of time. Contact stress may occur from continual use of a stapler or hole punch.
- Office workers are not typically exposed to the ergonomic risk factor of vibration because they do not usually operate vibrating tools such as powered belt sanders or reciprocating saws.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) are injuries or disorders of the nervous system or soft tissue such as muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, cartilage, blood vessels, and nerves. MSDs often occur from exposure to ergonomic risk factors.

- Signs or symptoms of MSDs include pain in your hands, wrists, fingers, forearms, joints, or elbows.
- This pain is often described as tightness, soreness, coldness, stiffness, burning, tingling, or numbness.
- Report any of these signs or symptoms to your supervisor immediately. Early treatment can prevent long-lasting problems.



Posture

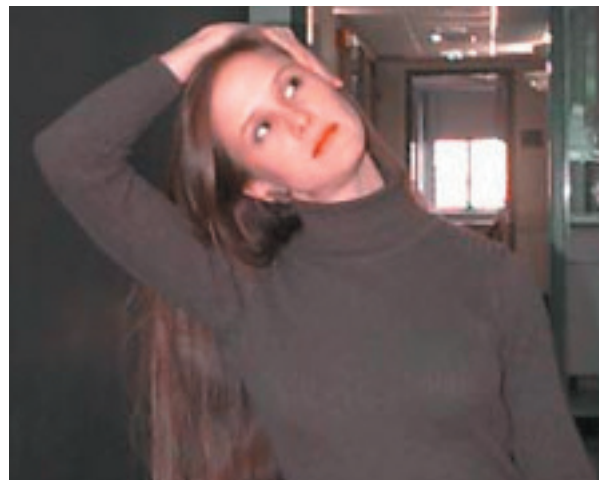
Your head should be facing straight ahead—not turned to the side or tilting down. To keep your head aligned properly, your monitor should be placed directly in front of you about an arm's length away. The level of the monitor should be such that your eyes are level with a point about 2 to 3 inches below the top of the screen.

- Your knees should be bent about 90 degrees so they are comfortable. Choose a chair that can be adjusted for height. Make sure the chair is comfortable, even after you sit 30 to 60 minutes. The chair should also have a comfortable backrest with adequate lumbar support. Sit in the chair so that your rear is against the backrest.
- Your feet should be resting flat on the floor or on a footrest. Remove any obstructions under your desk that interfere with the proper position of your legs and feet.
- Your wrists should be in a straight line with your forearms so that your wrists are not flexed up or down or bent to the either side. Choose a keyboard tray that is height adjustable and tilts. Remember not to rest your wrist on a wristrest while typing. This puts pressure on your carpal tunnel. Only use the wristrest during a typing pause.
- Your shoulders should be in a comfortable position and not hunched. Adjustable armrests on your chair will help support your shoulders, elbows, and wrists.
- Keep your elbows close your side. Extending your elbows out when typing puts additional strain on your shoulders and elbows.

One of the best ways to reduce exposure to repetition is by breaking up the day with different projects so that the same muscle groups are not used all day long. For example, if you spend a lot of time typing on the computer, then you will want to break up the day with alternate tasks. Every 30 to 60 minutes away from your workstation and go make some copies, do some filing, ask your boss a question. Do something productive that does not involve typing.

- Another way to reduce repetition is to take mini-breaks. Between bursts of typing activity, allow your hands to relax in a flat and straight posture. In a mini-break, you stay at your workstation, but change posture by writing down a note or making a phone call.
- Take an eye break at least every 15 minutes. Look away from the monitor at something at least 20 feet away for about a minute. This allows your eye muscles to relax. Blink rapidly for a few seconds to refresh the eyes' surface.

- Stretch your hand by making a fist and then extending and spreading your fingers. Wrist and forearm stretches can include holding your arms straight out in front of your body and bending your hands up and down. Stretch your shoulders by rolling your shoulders back and forth, or reach your arms overhead, stretch, and then bend from side to side. Stretch your neck by rolling your head up and down and from side to side. Stretch your back by standing up, placing your hands on your hips, and arching backward.



Neck Stretch

Stress

Stress can come from many areas of a person's life, such as personal problems, which include finances, family illness, and relationship problems. Lifestyle changes, such as having a baby, getting married, starting a new job, or moving, can contribute to stress.

Everyday hassles also contribute to stress and can include commuting to work, shopping in crowded stores, and standing in bank lines, etc. Job problems, such as long work hours, job insecurity, conflicting job expectations, and no opportunity for advancement, may also contribute to stress.

- Symptoms of stress include emotional distress such as anger, anxiety, and depression. You may experience muscular problems, including headaches or back pain. Stomach and bowel problems may also occur, such as heartburn, diarrhea, or constipation. Other symptoms include rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and chest pain.
- Episodic stress is a very common form of stress and usually occurs when the person takes on too many responsibilities. A person with episodic stress may have nervous energy and often be irritable and tense. This person may also be described by friends as a pessimistic "worrywart" because he or she always has a sense of impending doom.
- Stress also has some benefits. It is a source of adrenaline and energy that is sometimes needed to get a project done. Stress, when channeled correctly, can improve your focus and concentration. Stress may cause you to improve your performance at work and even help you to grow and become more confident.

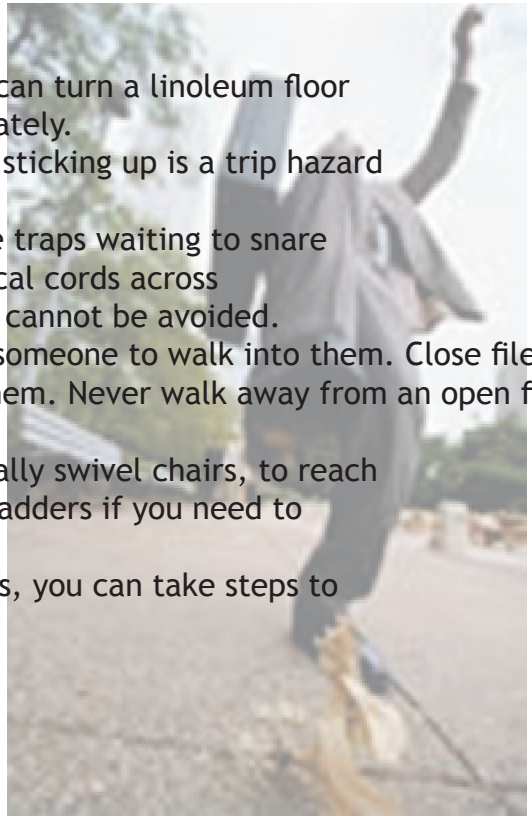
Control your reaction to stressful situations by thinking positively rather than negatively about the situation. Do not get angry or expect the worse. Instead, use the adrenaline to help you overcome the fear or worry. Use positive thoughts and self-talk.

- Some great ways to control stress are to exercise on a regular basis, eat a wellbalanced diet, and get plenty of sleep.
- Avoid stressful situations. Don't make any major lifestyle changes. Try taking the bus so you don't have to drive in commuter traffic. Don't shop on the weekend. Try to be cooperative with other people.
- If your life is too busy, get organized. Set priorities, develop a routine, and maintain an accurate calendar that contains all your commitments.
- Other forms of stress therapy include laughter, relaxation, and quiet time for yourself when you can read a book, take a quiet walk, or just go someplace where you can be alone.



Slip, trip, and fall hazards are more common than you may think in an office environment.

- A nonhazardous liquid such as water or coffee can turn a linoleum floor into a skating rink. Clean up liquid spills immediately.
- Torn carpet, linoleum, or other flooring that is sticking up is a trip hazard and should be repaired as soon as possible.
- Electrical cords laying across walkways are like traps waiting to snare unsuspecting office workers. Avoid laying electrical cords across walkways, or tape them down to the floor if this cannot be avoided.
- Open file cabinet drawers are just waiting for someone to walk into them. Close file cabinet drawers as soon as you are done using them. Never walk away from an open file cabinet drawer.
- Fall hazards include standing on chairs, especially swivel chairs, to reach objects on high shelves. Use step stools or step ladders if you need to reach a high shelf.
- Once you understand slip, trip, and fall hazards, you can take steps to prevent the hazards from becoming an injury.



Lifting

Back injuries are common in office environments. Most office employees are not used to lifting and carrying objects on a regular basis so their backs are not conditioned for that kind of work. If an office worker attempts to lift a heavy box, his or her back may give out.

- Do not attempt to lift more than you can handle. Get someone to help you and team lift the box together.
- Always maintain good back posture whether you are sitting, standing, or lifting. Keeping your back straight and strong will help it maintain strength and also prevent strained muscles or bulging disks that can result from poor posture.
- Use material handling aids to lift and carry objects whenever possible. Forklifts, pallet jacks, hand trucks, carts, and dollies, when used correctly, will take the strain off your back.
- Whenever you carry a load, make sure you can see over or around the load. You do not want to trip over an object or slip on a wet floor because you could not see where you were going.

Lifting Techniques

Establish a wide and stable stance. Your feet should be shoulder width apart and you should have good traction so your feet will not slip out from under you.

- Bend at your knees and hips, and squat down next to the object. Remember, do not bend over at your waist. Your rear end should not be sticking out.
- Firmly grip the object. Many injuries occur when the worker loses grip on the object and tries to readjust. The quick readjustment motion can strain a muscle.
- Pull the object close to your body. Trying to hold an object away from your body just results in a greater strain on your back. Keep the object snuggled against your body.
- Tightening your stomach muscles will act as a kind of back brace because the stomach muscles will help support the upper body.
- Rise up by using your legs. Keep your rear end in—do not let it stick out.

