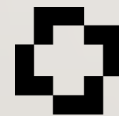


OFFICE SAFETY TRAINING



LOUISIANA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DIVISION OF SAFETY/SECURITY & ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

Despite common beliefs that the office provides a safe environment in which to work, many hazards exist which cause thousands of injuries and health problems each year among office workers. Since one-third of the work force is in offices, even low rates of work-related injuries and illnesses can have an immense impact on employee safety and health.

Today's modern offices are substantially different from the office environment of 20 years ago. Sweeping changes have occurred in the American workplace as a result of new office technology and automation of office equipment. Consequently, office workers are faced with many more hazards.



In addition to obvious hazards such as a slippery floor or an open file drawer, a modern office may also contain hazards such as poor lighting, noise, poorly designed furniture and equipment, and machines which emit noxious gases and fumes. Even the nature of office work itself has produced a whole host of stress-related symptoms and musculoskeletal strains. For example, long hours at the desk working on your computer monitor can cause pains in the neck and back, eyestrain, and a general feeling of tension and irritability.

This module includes the following sections:

- Leading Types of Disabling Accidents
- Common Office Safety and Health Hazards.

AT THE END OF THIS OFFICE SAFETY TRAINING, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- Identify the most common safety hazards in the office
- Apply safety and health principles into your daily work activities.

LEADING TYPES OF DISABLING ACCIDENTS

It is estimated that office workers sustain 76,000 fractures, dislocations, sprains, strains, and contusions each year. The leading types of disabling accidents that occur within the office are:

- Falls
- Strains and over-exertion
- Struck by or striking objects
- Caught in or between objects.

In addition, office workers are also injured as a result of foreign substances in the eye, spilled hot liquids, burns from fire, and electric shock.

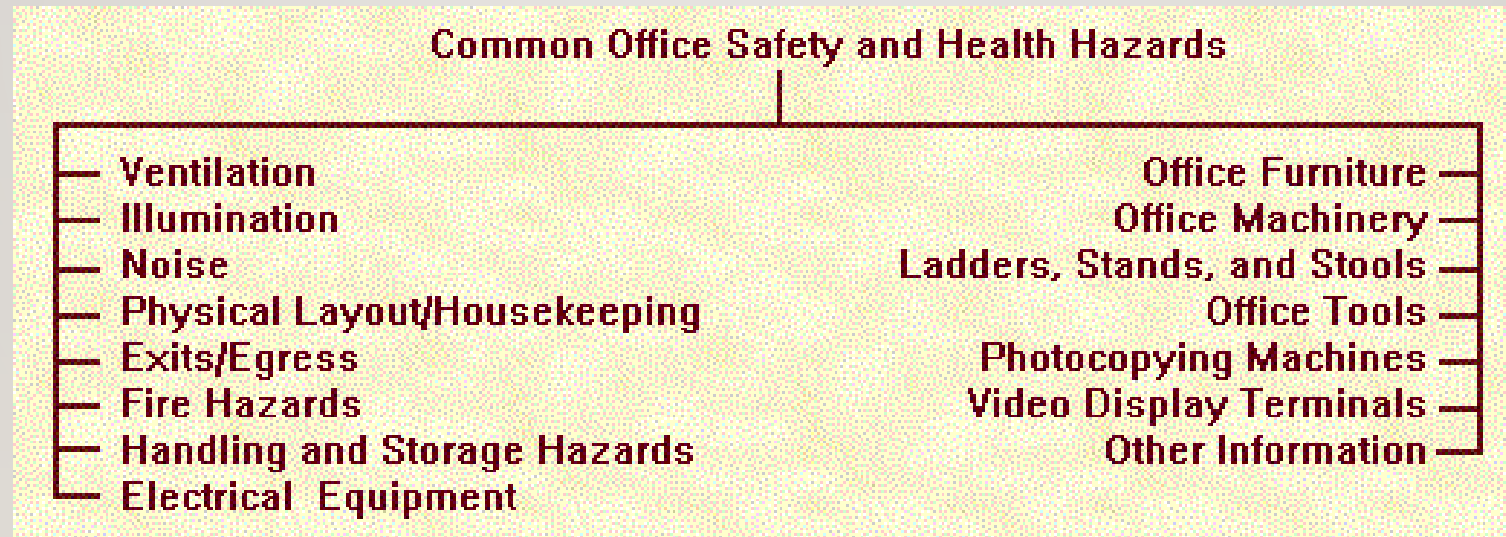
In recent years, illness has increased among the office worker population. This may be attributed, in part, to the increased presence of environmental toxins within the office and to stress-producing factors associated with the automated office. Resulting illnesses may include respiratory problems, skin diseases, and stress-related conditions.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - INTRODUCTION

The topics listed here provide information on safety and health hazards that are common to the office environment.

This section also provides information about control measures which can reduce or eliminate these hazards.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - VENTILATION

Sources of air pollution in the office that can cause health problems include:

- Natural agents (e.g., carbon monoxide, microorganisms, radon)
- Synthetic chemicals (e.g., formaldehyde, cleaning fluids, cigarette smoke, asbestos).

An adequate office ventilation system which delivers quality indoor air and provides for comfortable humidity and temperature is a necessity.

Where printing or copying machines are present, an exhaust ventilation system which draws particulates and gases away from the employees' breathing zone should be present.

Office machines and ventilation system components should be checked and maintained on a regular basis.



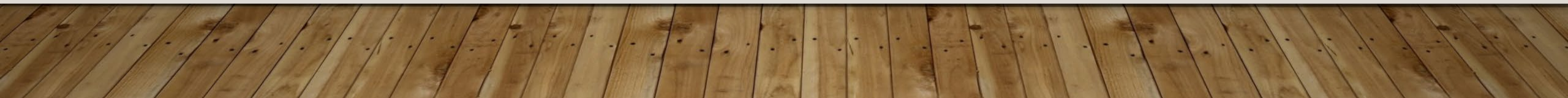
COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - ILLUMINATION

Lighting problems in the office cause:

- Glare
- Shadows
- Visual problems (i.e., eyestrain, fatigue, double-vision, etc.).

Poor lighting also can be a contributing factor in accidents.

Controls to prevent poor lighting conditions include:

- Regular maintenance of the lighting system
 - Light-colored dull finish on walls, ceilings, and floors to reduce glare
 - Adjustable shades on windows
 - Indirect lighting.
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COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - NOISE

In an office, workers can be subjected to many noise sources, such as:

- Video display terminals
- High-speed printers
- Telephones
- Human voices.

Noise can produce tension and stress, as well as damage to hearing. Some of the numerous measures available to control unwanted noise include:

- Place noisy machines in an enclosed space
- Use carpeting, draperies, and acoustical ceiling tiles to muffle noise
- Adjust telephone volume to its lowest level
- Rearrange traffic routes within the office to reduce traffic within and between work areas.

COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - PHYSICAL LAYOUT/HOUSEKEEPING

Poor design and/or poor housekeeping can lead to crowding, lack of privacy, slips, trips, and falls. The following are important factors related to office layout and orderliness: •At least 3 feet distance between desks and at least 50 square feet per employee

- Keep telephone and electrical cords out of aisles
- Group employees who use the same machines
- Office machines should be kept away from edges of desks and tables
- Regular inspection, repair, and replacement of faulty carpets
- Place mats inside building entrances
- Proper placement of electrical, telephone, and computer wires.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - EXITS/EGRESS

Blocked or improperly planned means of egress can lead to injuries as a result of slips, trips, and falls. If, during an emergency, employees become trapped due to improper egress, more serious injuries or fatalities may result.

Controls to ensure proper means of egress include:

- All exit access must be at least 36 inches wide
- Generally two exits should be provided
- Exits and access to exits must be marked
- Means of egress, including stairways used for emergency exit, should be free of obstructions and adequately lit
- Employees must be aware of exits and trained in procedures for evacuation.

COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - FIRE HAZARDS

A serious problem associated with office design is the potential for creating fire hazards. Another danger found in modern offices is combustible materials (e.g., furniture, rugs, fibers) which can easily ignite and often emit toxic fumes.

A number of steps can be taken to reduce office fire hazards:

- Store unused records/papers in fire resistant files or vaults
- Use flame-retardant materials
- Smoke only in designated areas and use proper ashtrays
- Fire extinguishers and alarms should be conspicuously placed and accessible.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - HANDLING AND STORAGE HAZARDS

Improper lifting can cause musculoskeletal disorders such as sprains, strains, and inflamed joints. Office materials that are improperly stored can lead to hazards such as objects falling on workers, poor visibility, and fires. There are several controls which can reduce handling and storage hazards.

- Materials should not be stored on top of cabinets.
- Heavy objects should be stored on lower shelves and materials stacked neatly.
- Materials should be stored inside cabinets, files, or lockers whenever possible.
- Materials must not be stored in aisles, corners, or passageways.
- Fire equipment should remain unobstructed.
- Flammable and combustible materials must be identified and properly stored.

An effective control program incorporating employee awareness and training and ergonomic design of work tasks can reduce back injuries.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

Electrical accidents in an office usually occur as a result of faulty or defective equipment, unsafe installation, or misuse of equipment. The following guidelines should be adhered to when installing or using electrical equipment:

- Equipment must be properly grounded to prevent shock injuries
- A sufficient number of outlets will prevent circuit overloading
- Avoid the use of poorly maintained or non-approved equipment
- Cords should not be dragged over nails, hooks, or other sharp objects
- Receptacles should be installed and electric equipment maintained so that no live parts are exposed
- Machines should be disconnected before cleaning or adjusting. Generally, machines and equipment should be locked or tagged out during maintenance.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - OFFICE FURNITURE

Defective furniture or misuse of chairs or file cabinets by office workers can lead to serious injuries. Listed here are controls related to chairs and cabinets:

- Chairs should be properly designed and regularly inspected for missing casters, shaky legs, and loose parts
- Do not lean back in a chair with your feet on a desk
- Do not scoot across the floor while sitting on a chair
- Never stand on a chair to reach an overhead object
- Open only one file drawer at a time
- Do not locate file cabinets close to doorways or in aisles
- Use drawer handles to close file drawers.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - OFFICE MACHINERY

Machines with ingoing nip points or rotating parts can cause lacerations, abrasions, fractures, and amputations if not adequately guarded.

Machines such as conveyors, electric hole punches, and paper shredders with hazardous moving parts must be guarded so that office workers cannot contact the moving parts.

Fans must have substantial bases and fan blades must be properly guarded.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - LADDERS, STANDS, AND STOOLS

Improper use of ladders, ladder stands, and stools can lead to falls. The following controls will help reduce ladder related injuries:

- Workers should always face the ladder when climbing up or down
- Ladders should be inspected regularly to ensure they are in good condition
- The top of a ladder should not be used as a step
- Ladders must only be used when they are fully open and the spreaders are locked.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - OFFICE TOOLS

Misuse of office tools, such as pens, pencils, paper, letter openers, scissors, and staplers, can cause cuts, punctures, and related infections. Injuries can be prevented by following precautions when using these materials:

- Paper cutters - Keep blade closed when not in use. A guard should be provided and fingers should be kept clear
- Staplers - Always use a staple remover. Never test a jammed stapler with your thumb
- Pencils, pens, scissors, etc. - Store sharp objects in a drawer or with the point down. Never hand someone a sharp object point first.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS - COPY MACHINES

Potential health hazards associated with copying machines include:

- Toxic chemicals
- Excessive noise
- Intense light.

Copy machines can also be a source of indoor air pollution when used in offices that are not well ventilated.

Use the controls listed below to reduce hazards:

- Keep the document cover closed
- Reduce noise exposure by isolating the machine
- Place machines in well-ventilated rooms away from workers' desks
- Have machines serviced routinely to prevent chemical emissions
- Avoid skin contact with copying chemicals
- Clean all spills and dispose of waste properly.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS – COMPUTER MONITORS

Health hazards related to computer monitors:

- Radiation
- Noise
- Eye irritation
- Low-back, neck, and shoulder pain
- Stress.

Studies have shown that the radiation levels emitted from computer monitors are well below those allowed by current standards. However, to minimize any potential exposure, only equipment for which the manufacturer will supply data on emissions should be used.



COMMON OFFICE SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS – COMPUTER MONITORS

Proper ergonomic design includes the relation of the operator to the screen, background, lighting, and operator's posture. All of these design elements should be carefully tailored to prevent discomfort. The keyboard position, document holder, screen design, characters, and color are all factors to consider.

Work breaks and variation of tasks enable office workers to rest their eyes. Postural strain related to computer use can be relieved by performing simple exercises.



QUESTIONS

IF YOU SEE IT REPORT IT:

- John Poche John.Poche2@la.gov 225-342-7524
- Timothy White Timothy.White2@la.gov 225-342-3501