

15. Office Safety

Overview

This section discusses the following topics:

- Chemical Safety
- Elevator Safety
- Emergency Action Plan
- Ergonomics
- General Office Hazard Safety
- Laptop Computer Security
- Office Equipment Safety
- Office Theft
- Stairway Safety
- Working Late

Although many employees do not look at the office environment as requiring work area protection guidelines, OSHA reports 40,000 disabling injuries and 2,000 safety-related deaths in offices each year. This section covers topics important to safety and health when working in an office environment.

References

There are no documents referenced in this section.

Chemical Safety

Every employee has the "Right to Know" what chemical hazards they are exposed to in the workplace. It may appear there are no chemical hazards in the office environment, but items such as cleaning supplies, toner for printers and copiers, and ink are all chemicals that can present hazards when used under certain circumstances.

Employees have a right to know the following:

- Chemicals that exist in their work environment
- Hazards to their health that can be caused by chemicals
- What to do if exposed to chemicals

The following guidelines apply to chemical safety:

1. If chemicals with potential hazards to employees exist, a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) or label for that particular chemical must be available. If there is a central location for maintaining MSDS sheets, the location as well as the name of the person responsible for the MSDS log maintenance must be conveyed to each and every worker.

Note: Employees are responsible for providing contract and temporary employees with hazard communication information.

2. It is the responsibility of the employee to read the MSDS sheets or labels before using any chemicals in the workplace.
3. If an employee is exposed to a hazardous chemical, they must alert their supervisor of the incident and the circumstances under which the incident happened.

Elevator Safety

Elevators present special security risks because they are small, enclosed spaces that make it difficult for a person to protect himself or herself. The following guidelines apply to elevator safety:

1. Never ride an elevator with a suspicious person.

2. Stand near the control panel if a suspicious person enters the elevator.
3. Avoid taking the elevator to the basement at night. Basement areas are prime rape and assault areas.
4. Leave the elevator or don't get on the elevator if someone makes you uncomfortable.
5. Make sure that you, your clothes/garments, and any other personal items are clear from the door to avoid items being smashed or torn.

Emergency Action Plan

An Emergency Action Plan is provided to employees at their location. In case of a fire, bomb threat, severe weather, tornado or any other emergency, employees need to know where to go and what to do. An office environment is not exempt.

The employer provides an evacuation procedure in the event of an emergency. Office employees should also be familiar with building exits. Refer to Section 18, Emergency Preparedness and Response, for more information about what to do in emergency situations.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the science of adapting equipment, procedures, and surroundings to people. Office ergonomics is generally associated with the use of computers, but also includes tasks with continuous repetitive motion and tasks that produce musculoskeletal stress. Employees should be trained and educated on the proper use of equipment as well as the hazards they are exposed to when using the equipment.

Refer to Section 14, Ergonomics Program, for more information about ergonomics.

The following guidelines relate to office ergonomics:

1. Employers must make every effort to provide ergonomically sound workstations for office employees. Adjust workstations for body comfort. When the workstation is a multi-user station, employees must know how to adjust chairs and other components of the workstation.

2. Check lighting and glare to guard against headaches, eye fatigue, and eye strain.
3. Ergonomics also includes taking good care of oneself, properly using equipment, and adjusting the workstation for comfort. If you are unable to make the adjustments, inform your supervisor to make the arrangements.

General Office Hazard Safety

Although the most frequent accidents in the office environment are attributed to slips and falls, employers and employees should make every effort to identify all the hazards in an office that can expose an employee to injury. Poor housekeeping is the most common contributor to slips, falls, and other hazards in the office.

To guard against general office hazards:

1. Do not allow telephone cords and cables to stick out in front of desks and tables or lie hazardously on the floor. If unavoidable, have them taped to the floor to prevent trip and falls.
2. Watch for damaged or worn electrical cords, especially at the point where the cord enters the equipment housing or plug.
3. Do not overload extension cords or electrical outlets.
4. **Observe good housekeeping practices.**
5. Ensure the paper cutter cutting arm is always securely closed when not in use.
6. Keep aisles and walkways free of objects that can cause tripping hazards.
7. Clean up spills on floors to eliminate slipping hazards.
8. Warn others when doors or cabinet drawers are open.
9. Warn affected persons when there are hazards from work performed overhead.
10. Immediately report water leaks, holes in rugs, and missing tiles to maintenance personnel.

11. Observe maintenance “Wet Floor Area” signs. Walk with caution.

Do not use space heaters or portable fans in work areas without approval from Risk Management or a Regional Delegate of the Safety Council. Work space conditions and available electrical outlets limit the use of space heaters or portable fans.

Laptop Computer Security

1. To prevent physical damage or theft, use a sturdy, weatherproof, padded, adequately sized conservative bag.
2. Do not position laptop computers near exterior windows where they may be subject to smash or grab types of theft.
- 3. Laptop computers must be taken home or kept in a locked cabinet during non-business hours.**
4. Backup files and keep current copies readily accessible.
5. Use anti-viral software. The Network Security Administrator must approve the purchase and usage of all software and programs used on company owned equipment.
6. Never check a laptop computer as baggage. Let the laptop computer pass through airport x-ray security and keep your eyes on it.
7. As many laptops look similar or even identical, affix your business card or other identification to your laptop.
8. If a laptop computer must be left in an automobile, keep it locked and out of sight
9. Avoid storing a laptop computer in an automobile in very cold or very hot weather.
10. Negligent care of a laptop computer may result in loss of privilege.
- 11. Employee and Customer confidential private information must never be downloaded to and saved on a laptop hard drive or any other type of portable drive or disk. Confidential personal information must remain on secure internal servers.**

Office Equipment Safety

The office environment contains many different types of equipment. Equipment can be electrical like computers or sharp like scissors. All this equipment is safe when properly used. When not properly used the simplest piece of equipment can expose employees to hazards from cuts to electrocution.

The following is discussed as it relates to office equipment safety:

- Machines and Equipment Safety
- Chair Safety
- Desk Safety
- Filing Cabinet Safety

Machines and Equipment Safety

The following guidelines apply to machine and equipment safety:

1. Employees should be trained on the proper use of all office equipment required to perform their job. It should never be **assumed** an employee is trained on the proper use of equipment. If an employee has not been trained on the proper use of office equipment, the employee is responsible for asking and receiving instruction before using the equipment.
2. Always ensure equipment guards are secured in place before use if equipment requires the use of guards.
3. Don't use equipment that is defective.
4. Never use electrically powered equipment with cords or plugs that are damaged, frayed or torn. Report these to your supervisor or maintenance.
5. Don't leave cords across walkways and aisles where employee traffic can be exposed to trip hazards.
6. Don't overload electrical outlets.

Chair Safety

The following guidelines apply to chair safety:

1. Sit well back in the seat keeping the back straight. Don't sit with one foot on the seat under the body. Don't tilt back in a chair.
2. **Never use a chair as a ladder.**
3. Ensure chair is adjusted to the correct height and the backrest has the proper tension before use.
4. Avoid leaving chairs in aisles and other passageways.
5. Do not use chairs with broken sides, rungs, seats or other defects. Report these to your supervisor or maintenance.

Desk Safety

The following guidelines apply to desk safety:

1. Always keep drawers closed when not in use. To close drawers, push on the handles to avoid pinching the fingers.
2. Avoid placing heavy or bulky objects near the edge of a desk. Use good housekeeping skills to keep desk clear of potential dangerous objects.
3. Always store sharp or pointed objects with the sharp points directed away from the body position while sitting at a desk. Never place pencils in a container on the desk with points up.
4. Never use a desk as a ladder.

Filing Cabinet Safety

The following guidelines apply to filing cabinet safety:

1. Locate filing cabinets so open drawers or doors do not block aisles.
2. To eliminate the possibility of a cabinet tipping over, open one drawer at a time and store all heavy items in lower drawers. It is recommended files be fastened together.
3. Doors or drawers should not be left open when not in use.
4. Push on the handles of a drawer to close it to avoid pinched fingers.

5. Never use an open file drawer as a ladder.

Office Theft

Protect yourself from theft at the office by doing the following:

1. Lock items of value in your desk.
2. Never leave change, jewelry or any valuables on your desk.
3. Ensure all visitors sign a visitor log and are accompanied past the reception area.
4. Report any suspicious persons to your supervisor.

Stairway Safety

The following guidelines apply to stairway safety:

1. Always use the handrail for stability.
2. Walk, don't run, and place full length of foot on steps and take one step at a time.
3. Walk single file and stay to the right.
4. Don't read or carry objects that obstruct your view.
5. Devote full attention to a safe ascent or descent. Watch out for litter on the stairs and loose, broken, worn or slippery treads. Report such problems to the appropriate person.

Working Late

The following guidelines apply to working late at the office:

1. Find out who is working in the building with you.
2. Lock doors when and where possible.
3. Have someone walk with you to your car when possible.
4. If confronted by a stranger or a suspicious person, give the impression you are expecting others. This may prevent a stranger from committing a crime.
5. Don't look vulnerable. Walk with an air of confidence and portray you are not easily intimidated.
6. Walk with your door key in your hand.
7. Trust your instincts. If you feel nervous or uneasy, you may have a good reason to be.

Remember: "**Safety is everyone's business.**" No matter where you work, take the time to ensure your environment is safe and hazard free.