

Using office areas

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What is the problem?

Using office areas that are unsuitable (eg poorly designed or cluttered) for computer or administrative tasks.

What are the risks?

Workers may be at risk of musculoskeletal injuries (eg sprains, strains, fractures and soft tissue injuries) to the back, neck or shoulders when using awkward postures, or exerting high or unexpected force in office areas.

Common sources of risk include:

- poorly designed or cluttered office areas
- prolonged and intense keyboard and mouse use and high demands on vision
- placement of objects above shoulder height or below knee height
- manually lifting or moving heavy objects
- inappropriate seating
- supporting the telephone on the shoulder when using a computer or writing
- sustained mental effort and peak demands or set work rates
- insufficient time to complete work.

Workers may also be at risk of injuries from slips and trips or from being struck by objects due to:

- cluttered or poorly maintained office areas
- poorly maintained floor surfaces
- unsecured filing cabinets or unstable shelving.

What are solutions to the problems?

Systems

Develop systems of work that:

- match the numbers of workers to the task and environment
- alternate repetitive tasks with tasks requiring different postures and movements
- regularly review supplies and equipment and discard objects that don't need to be retained or have not been used within a designated timeframe (eg 12 months)
- provide workers with information, instruction, training and supervision in relation to work procedures and use of equipment

- identify and report safety issues so they can be fixed as soon as possible
- schedule and record regular inspections and maintenance of all areas of the workplace and equipment
- allocate sufficient time to complete work tasks.

Computers, desks and chairs

- Provide a height-adjustable desk so workers can sit comfortably at the desk with their feet flat on the floor. If the desk is not height adjustable, provide a footstool.
- Provide chairs that can be easily adjusted and have a five-star base.
- Provide information to workers on chair adjustments/ergonomics. For example:
 - adjust the height of the chair so the forearms are parallel to the desk when elbows are at 90 degrees or more
 - adjust the backrest of the chair so it supports the lower back
 - remove armrests if they restrict the ability to move closer to the desk or cause the shoulders to be raised when typing.
- Position the top of the computer screen at eye level, at arms length and away from sources of glare such as windows or lights.
- If laptops are used for long periods, reduce awkward postures by using a laptop stand, separate computer monitor and/or a separate keyboard and mouse.
- Provide adequate space for workstations.
- Keep the space under the desk free from objects or clutter.
- Secure cables under computer desks to minimise tripping hazards.
- Position computer keyboard and mouse to avoid overstretching.
- Use document holders to avoid working from documents that are flat on the desk.
- Place frequently used items within easy reach.
- Use a telephone headset to avoid awkward postures.
- Take regular breaks away from the desk to stand, relax eyes, and stretch or perform other tasks.

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A Health and Safety Solution Using office areas

Filing cabinets and shelving

- Secure filing cabinets to the wall or use filing cabinets with anti-tilt features.
- Fix shelving to the floor and walls of the office area.
- Use shelving with a safe working load limit (designated by the manufacturer) and do not exceed this weight limit.
- Maintain shelving and replace any shelving that is cracked, loose or damaged.
- Place items frequently used in easy-to-access shelves, between shoulder and knee height.

- Store heavier objects between knee and shoulder height rather than at floor level or overhead.
- Store objects in smaller containers to avoid having to lift and balance heavy loads.

Environment

- Maintain floor areas to remove uneven or damaged surfaces that may cause people to trip.
- Install additional power points to avoid stretching electrical cords across floors.

The problem



The office is cluttered and has inadequate space under the desk for the worker's legs.

A solution



The desk, chair and computer equipment are adjustable for the worker. Storage systems are used to reduce clutter. A window blind reduces glare.

Further information

WorkSafe Advisory Service

Toll-free 1800 136 089

info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

worksafe.vic.gov.au

Related WorkSafe publications

Officewise, 2006

Manual Handling Code of Practice, 2000

Working safely in community services, 2006

Injury hotspot – Community support services, 2008

WorkSafe OHS compliance kits –

Children's services, disability service, home care, community support services

Volunteer health and safety –

A handbook for community service organisations, 2008

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