

# 13. Office Safety Procedures

## 1.0 Introduction

Office safety is like safety anywhere else. It doesn't just automatically happen. It is the result of the individual effort of everyone concerned.

Many mishaps in offices nationwide stem from the fact that these areas are frequently considered non-hazardous and therefore safety is often not emphasized. The following are some suggestions to help reduce some of the hazards found in these areas.

## 2.0 Some General Tips

- Come to work rested. Fatigue is a frequent factor in mishaps. It can cause people to lose concentration, and become distracted. Build adequate breaks into your daily routine.
- Think about safety and follow safety rules. Before doing something, ask yourself whether what you are about to do is going to be safe for yourself or others. In this way, safe work habits can develop quickly.
- Avoid practical jokes that may cause injury. These have no place in the work area.
- Know your emergency procedures. Please refer to the Emergency Procedures Handbook. The on campus emergency number is x7911.
- Contact x7911 to report a hazardous spill, such as a chemical or blood spill.

## 3.0 Office Ergonomics and Lifting

“Ergonomics” is the study of how people interact with their work environment. When workplace design is fitted to the needs and capabilities of employees, comfort and productivity are at their highest. Every individual and working situation is different, and not every factor in the workplace can be changed. Look for ways to increase ergonomic efficiency where possible. Please refer to the section on lifting and ergonomics in this Health & Safety Manual for some general guidelines that you can follow to make your work experience less demanding on the eyes, body, and mind.

## 4.0 Preventing Fall Injuries

- Keep the floor clean. Small or loose objects can cause someone to slip, trip, or fall.
- Use aisles. Avoid taking short cuts between desks where wastebaskets, phone and extension cords or other objects are located.
- Keep file and desk drawers closed.
- Watch your step. Don't read while walking, nor obstruct your vision with tall loads. Report burned out lights promptly to Facilities Management.
- Wipe up wet spots. Carry beverages in covered containers or on trays to help prevent spills.
- Use foot protection. Wear shoes that protect from cuts, crushing, liquids, or slipping. In offices, lower heels are less fatiguing.
- Keep chairs solidly on the floor. Tilting back in chairs can cause injuries.
- Avoid stringing electrical cords across walkways. If a cord must lay across a walkway, it should be placed within a cord conduit that protects the cord and limits the trip hazard.

## 5.0 Preventing Filing and Storage Accidents

- Avoid overloading top drawers. Overloading top drawers can bring the file cabinet down on you. Too much weight near the front of a drawer can also tipping.
- Close one drawer before opening another. Prevent bangs on the head or unexpected trips.
- Close drawer gently using handles. Fingers can get pinched when you use top or sides of drawers.
- Don't struggle with stuck drawers or doors. That is an easy way to cause back injury or bring everything down on you. If a drawer or door is stuck, get assistance and have it repaired.
- Anchor bookshelves and file cabinets to the wall. This will prevent shelves from falling on you or blocking your exit in case of an earthquake.

## 6.0 Preventing Machine Accidents

- Read instructions or listen to them carefully. Never use machines you do not know how to operate.
- Be sure mechanical guards are in place every time you use a machine. If a machine guard has been temporarily removed, be sure it is replaced before using the machine. Watch your hands and use caution.
- Turn machines off. Do so before making adjustments, applying flammable solutions (only when appropriate), or whenever leaving a machine, even for a minute.
- Be alert for electrical hazards. Electric current can cause injury or death or fire. If a machine overheats, smokes, or sparks, or you feel even a slight shock, unplug it and have it repaired.
- Check machine position before use. Computers, fax machines, photocopiers, and adding machines should be firmly on the working surface. Heavy or expensive equipment should be anchored to the surface for earthquake stability.
- Keep liquids away from electrical machines, keyboards, or cords. Electricity and water do not mix.
- Electric fans. Do not remove protective guards from fans. Ensure that fan guards have openings no larger than one-half inch. Do not place fans in aisles or doorways.

## 7.0 Preventing Supply Room Accidents

- Use good housekeeping. Cleanliness makes work easier and conditions safer. Keep aisles clear and shelves orderly with materials secure. Materials stored on shelves may not be higher than 2 feet below the ceiling.
- Store chemicals and flammables. Carefully label them and seal in approved containers (see the Hazard Communication chapter). Training must be provided to those handling hazardous materials.
- Dispose of shipping and packing materials. Loose debris can cause falls and is a fire hazard.
- Open packages correctly. The safest way to open a package is to inspect for sharp projections and rough edges. Cut away from body using the right tool for the job.
- Use a ladder or stepstool. Do not rely on chairs or shelves for support. Use a ladder that is sturdy, with the feet set firmly on the ground. Face the ladder when climbing, avoid stretching beyond the ladder, get off the ladder to move it, and avoid carrying more than you can safely handle.

## 8.0 Preventing Cuts and Punctures

- Utility knives & other cutting instruments, use care with cutting tools. In most cases, cutting away from your hand or body is the preferred method.
- Sharps or pointed objects, store them separately in a drawer where they are visible when searching for the item.
- Paper cutters, maintain the blade and cutter. Guards must be installed during use. Do not cut too many sheets at one time.
- Broken glass, sweep up pieces instead of picking them up by hand. Glass splinters can be picked up with a damp paper towel.
- Bloodborne safety concerns, if broken glass, clothing, or objects have blood on them, contact Campus Safety (x7911) to report a blood spill.

## 9.0 Fire Prevention

- No smoking is permitted inside or within 50 feet of buildings.
- Smoking is not permitted where any flammable liquid is being used.
- Do not overload outlets and extension cords. Contact Facilities Management or Computing and Telecommunications for help in identifying whether a circuit is overloaded. Extension cords may only be used for temporary purposes. Permanent wiring must be installed for long term needs.
- Do not “daisy chain” extension cords. Extension cords may not be connected in series to form a longer cord. Purchase and use the length needed for the job.
- Identify cord insulation damage. Inspect and report any damage to switches, fixtures, and wires. Do not pinch wires under or around furniture.
- Use three-prong plugs to provide protection from shock.
- Know where fire extinguishers are located and know how to use them! Take a fire safety class from Environmental Health & Safety.
- Keep aisles and exits clear.
- Know the location of fire exits.
- Space heaters may be used with caution. Three (3) feet of clearance must be maintained on all sides of the heater. The heater must have an auto-turn off feature if tipped or overheated.

## 10.0 Security Issues

- Use the Campus Safety escort service when working late or traversing isolated areas.
- Prepare an alert system, such as a specific word, that notifies co-workers of a potentially threatening situation.
- Develop internal office response protocols for potentially threatening situations. Call x7911 to report such situations.
- Lock your office door when not present.
- Use caution when sorting or opening mail. Look for suspicious packages and letters. If you find a suspicious package or letter, please contact Campus Safety at x7911. The following are mail characteristics of a suspicious nature:
  - Excessive postage
  - Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
  - Incorrect titles
  - Title, but no name

- Misspellings of common words
- Oily stains, discolorations or odor
- No return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as “Personal” or “Confidential”
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address

