Office Safety Met

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Office safety is a duty and moral responsibility of every company. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) states office safety as an obligation and that employers must provide a workplace free from serious hazards. Ensuring office health and safety promotes the wellness of both employees and employers and avoids the likelihood of accidents that may result in property damage, injuries or, worse, loss of life.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

FIVE OF THE COMMON OFFICE HAZARDS:

1. **Slips, Trips and Falls**

Universal slip, trip and fall culprits include unattended spills, wet floors, exposed cords, unstable work surfaces, uneven floors, loose rugs, and cluttered areas.

1. **Ergonomic Injuries**

Office workers spend many hours a day seated at a desk, working on a computer, resulting in ergonomic strains and other injuries related to posture and repetitive movement. These types of hazards can be difficult to detect.

1. **Eye Strain**

Spending a large portion of your workday at the computer can cause eyestrain, according to the Mayo Clinic. Eyes may become dry and irritated, and workers may begin having trouble focusing. Light levels should be suitable for the work task—for instance, manual detail work may require higher levels of lighting, but staring at a computer monitor does not, the NSC said.

1. **Fire Safety**

According to the latest available data, fire departments responded to approximately 17,500 office fires in 2012, which resulted in $643 million in property damage, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

1. **Indoor Air Quality**

The prevalence of poor indoor air quality has contributed to a rise in occupational asthma and other respiratory disorders, chemical sensitivity, and allergies, according to the NSC. Some of the reasons for poor air quality are inadequate ventilation systems; office overcrowding; the presence of cleaning chemicals and pesticides; water damage and mold growth; cubicle design that blocks off air flow to work areas; too much or too little humidity; and poor housekeeping, which leads to dirty work environments.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

EVALUATE THE OFFICE FOR POTENTIAL HAZARDS

- **Ergonomics**

Take a moment to pause and consider how you're sitting. Is your back straight? Are your shoulders hunched over? Can your feet reach the floor? Is your computer monitor or mobile device screen too close or too far away? These inconveniences may seem small on a day-to-day basis, but if you sit hunched over or strain to see your monitor every day for ten years, you could cause serious damage to your body. This can lead to pain, numbness, tingling and even musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs. MSDs include carpal tunnel, leg numbness, and chronic pain in the neck, back or shoulders.

To avoid MSDs, you should train your employees to set up their workplaces to provide neutral body positioning. To achieve neutral body positioning, adjust your chair and desk so that you hands, wrists and forearms are straight and parallel to the floor. Then, keep your head level and balanced, your shoulders relaxed and your elbows close to your body. Your knees should be at the same height

as your hips and should be parallel to the floor. Your feet should be fully supported by the floor or by a footrest.

- **Physical Layout**

A poor office layout can distract employees, decrease productivity and morale, and put employees at risk for trips, falls, bumps and other injuries. Desks should be placed at least three feet apart, and office equipment like computers and printers shouldn't be placed on the edge of desks. Employees shouldn't sit beneath an uncovered vent that dumps hot or cold air on them. Filing cabinets should be closed when not in use, and cords should be neatly organized where they don't present tripping hazards and aren't rolled over by desk chairs.

- **Lighting**

Too much lighting can cause glare on computer screens, which can cause eye fatigue and strain. Employees should never sit with their backs to a window. Too-bright offices can be made dimmer by removing one of the rods in overhead fluorescent lighting. Too-dark offices can be made brighter with task lamps.

- **Air Quality**

Poor air quality, caused by construction elsewhere in the building, mold and mildew, or unpleasant odors, can cause respiratory illness, dizziness, and more. You should keep all common areas, especially kitchens, clean and free from spoiled food. If you suspect that your office has mold or mildew problems, you can call a professional to measure the mold levels in each room.

- **Noise Levels**

High noise levels can trigger headaches or migraines and distract your employees from their work. This is particularly common in open office environments. To combat this, you can move desks farther apart, turn down the ringers on all phones, require employees to use headphones when listening to audio at their computers, and move noisy office machines away from desks.

- **Storage**

When storing boxes of files, papers or other flammable materials, you should be sure to never store them near an ignition source, like a water heater. Stack the heaviest objects or boxes on the bottom and the lightest objects on top. Consider securing storage racks to the wall with a wall anchor so they don't tip over, and never store objects in walkways where they could present a tripping hazard.

- **Electrical Equipment**

About 6,000 office fires are reporting every year in the United States. Many of these are caused by malfunctioning or improperly used electrical equipment. Office fires are particularly dangerous because most office equipment, like chairs and machinery, give off toxic fumes as they burn. Inspect all electrical equipment, like monitors, fax machines, and space heaters, for damaged cords and plugs. Make sure that your employees are not overloading electrical outlets with multiple power strips or plugging multiple extension cords into each other. Train your new and existing employees over what types of electrical equipment are and are not allowed in your workplace.

TOP SEVEN SAFETY TIPS FOR OFFICE WORKERS TO PREVENT WORKPLACE INJURIES

- **Make sure your desk setup is ergonomic**

To maintain a neutral posture, your head should be centered over your neck and shoulders, wrists flat and elbows resting comfortably at your side. If your feet won't touch the ground unless you lean forward, use a footrest.

- **Take regular breaks to get up and move around**

Sitting all day puts office workers at risk for numerous health problems. Our warm up and stretching guide gives you easy exercises you can do at work.

- **When it's slippery due to ice and snow, walk like a penguin when entering and leaving your office**

Winter slips and falls in parking lots are extremely common. To avoid them, walk like a penguin by walking flat footed taking short, slow steps. It’s also important to wear sensible footwear and carry only what you can handle.

- **Use a headset for prolonged or frequent phone use**

Cradling the phone between your shoulder and ear can cause neck and back pain.

- **Keep your workplace tidy**

Clean up spills immediately, keep aisles free of clutter, and tie up or secure cords so they don’t pose a trip hazard.

- **Don’t let electrical cords create a fire risk**

Avoid running electrical cords under carpet or through windows and doorways. Also, don’t fasten them with unapproved devices, such as staples.

- **Know your office emergency procedures**

Make sure you know what to do in the event of a fire, storm, violent intruder, medical problem or other emergency.

FINAL WORD

Because of the general perception that construction or oilrig work is much more dangerous than office environment work, much more education is needed to dispel that perception. Along with fractures, dislocations, strains, sprains, and contusions, in recent years illness has increased among the office worker population.