

The Facts About Office Safety

Office safety is an important aspect of workplace safety and should not be considered trivial.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration estimates 40,000 office workers sustain disabling injuries each year; 200 of these injuries are fatal. There are countless cases of back injuries, bruises, and skin rashes that are not reported, many of them because they are not considered a direct result of unsafe office environments.

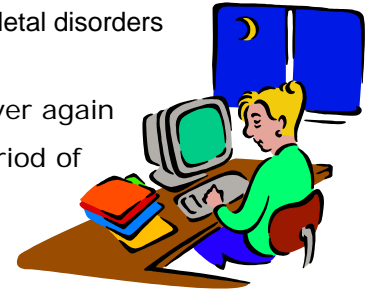
OSHA estimates that more than \$100,000,000 is lost annually in medical and workers' compensation costs due to office-related injuries.

The leading causes of disabling office accidents are slips and falls, strains, overexertion, falling objects, and workers striking objects or being caught in or between objects. Other hazards include electrical equipment and wiring, and fires.

Personal ergonomics key to reducing musculoskeletal injuries

Poor ergonomics—forcing our bodies into unnatural positions and circumstances—is the cause of many musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). In the office, it takes the form of:

- Repeating the same motion over and over again
- Staying the same position for a long period of time
- Stretching or twisting to reach supplies or materials
- Lifting with the back, rather than the legs



One way to improve ergonomics is through engineering controls—technology or equipment. Chairs and work surfaces that adjust to different heights allow a variety of workers to use the same space comfortably and safely. Padded handles on instruments or tools can reduce strain on the hands.

But the best way to improve personal ergonomics is to pay attention to the way you do things and change activities that cause strain or pain.

The idea is to reduce the need for awkward movements or positions. Arrange your work area so that you *don't* have to:

- Reach more than 20 inches to get supplies or equipment
- Reach above your shoulders or behind your back.
- Bend from a sitting or standing position to lift or move objects.

If your job involves working at a computer for long periods of time, take the time to arrange your screen and keyboard to prevent injury.

- The computer screen should be about 12 to 18 inches from your face.
- The top of the screen and the document holder should be just below eye level.
- Position the keyboard so that you can reach all of the keys easily with your wrists straight and your elbows at a right angle. Use a padded wrist rest if your wrists need additional support.
- Make sure your chair has good back support.
- Don't slouch. Sit up straight with your knees bent and your back against the chair.

Supply and Equipment Storage Is a Common Hazard

How we store our supplies and equipment greatly affects the safety of our workplace.

Improper storage can obstruct visibility, create fall or trip hazards, create fire hazards, or hinder emergency response.

In a healthcare setting, good housekeeping goes way beyond mopping the floors and cleaning patient rooms and public areas. It requires all workers to ensure that they don't inadvertently add to the hazards already found in the hospital.

Materials and equipment are improperly stored whenever they are:

- Within 18" of sprinkler heads.
- In corridors or aisles
- Obstructing doors, fire exits, or fire-fighting equipment
- Blocking electrical or communication panels
- Piled too high
- In rooms or closets not designated by the hospital as storage areas

Some supplies—such as hazardous or flammable materials—have very specific storage requirements, such as specially designed cabinets or built spaces.

Musculoskeletal injuries don't usually develop overnight.

Most of the time, they are cumulative, the result of continued wear and tear on muscles, tendons, and nerves. In order to prevent MSDs, you have to be aware of the symptoms so that you can take action before a long-term problem develops.

MSDs often are signaled by:

- Numbness or tingling
- Pain
- Cramping
- Stiffness
- Decreased range of motion
- Burning
- Swelling
- Aching
- Redness or color loss

Be aware of how your body feels. Tell your supervisor if you experience any of the signs or symptoms after performing certain tasks or working all day.

No matter what your job, there are a few basic habits that will help you protect yourself from an ergonomic injury.

- Whenever possible, use two hands, not one, to perform job tasks.
- Grip with your whole hand and all of your fingers.
- Don't lean on your elbows.
- Perform tasks with your palms down and your wrists straight.
- Squat to pick up things from the floor, keeping your back straight and your knees bent.
- Change positions often.
- Stop and stretch periodically.

It's the common hazards that trip us up.

More office injuries are caused by falls than any other event. And the things that cause workers to fall are mainly mundane and preventable.

Here are a few tips to keep you and your co-workers on your feet.

- Close drawers completely after every use.
- Keep aisles and exits clear.
- Never stretch electrical cords or wires over walkways.
- Always use a stepladder, rather than a chair, to reach something above your head.
- Clean up spills immediately.
- Report loose carpeting or damaged flooring.
- Never carry anything that obscures your vision.
- Wear shoes with non-slip soles.



If you feel like you're about to fall...roll, don't reach. By letting the body crumple and roll, you are more likely to absorb the impact and momentum of a fall without incurring injury. Reaching out an arm or leg to break the fall may result in a broken limb.

Hospital Safety Website

www.hosp.uky.edu/hospsafety

- Click on *Make a Report* to submit incident reports online
- Access **Safe Talk**, the monthly safety bulletin, including past editions
- Review EOC (Environment of Care management) plans
- Search for MSDS (material safety data sheets)
- Connect to campus safety websites
- Print evaluations and checklists
- Review JCAHO standards

