

# OFFICE SAFETY MATTERS

## Don't Forget the "Little Things"

Employers who use the services of health and safety specialists (such as ourselves) have, by the very act of seeking assistance, recognised that some work activities are inherently risky and need careful consideration and management.

However, whilst most people understand the need to take suitable precautions when working at height or in confined spaces for example, they may not recognise quite so easily that almost all work activities have the potential to cause harm and must therefore be properly assessed and managed.



The vast majority of office workers use computers these days, but how many workstations have been properly assessed, as required by the *Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992*?

We aren't suggesting that DSE workstations need to be as futuristic as the one shown here (although it would look pretty good in Reception), but it is essential that they are properly designed and used, so as to avoid causing problems for their users.

In fact, such are the problems that can be caused by poorly designed workstations, conditions such as some Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI) are specified Occupational Diseases and reportable under RIDDOR in the same way as a fractured arm or loss of sight.

If you have one of our interactive Health & Safety Manuals, you will find more information in there about Display Screen Equipment, but if you would like any further information, please contact these offices and we will be pleased to assist.

### Fire Risk Assessments

Fire safety is something that we all agree is needed, but is often not given the attention it deserves. An office fire could have a devastating effect on business - from the very real risk of injury or death and from the loss of vital information and equipment.



Furthermore, it is likely that insurance companies will take a dim view of claims where it cannot be shown that legal requirements were met.

A Fire Risk Assessment must be carried out to identify what precautions are necessary. Many people think that, because the office has fire extinguishers and Fire Exit signs, an assessment has been completed, but this is not usually the case. There are many more aspects that must be considered in order that the correct precautions can be taken.

Please contact us if you would like details of our Fire Risk Assessment services.

### OFFICE STAFF MISSING OUT ON MANUAL HANDLING TRAINING

Over one third of all reportable "over three day" injuries are related to manual handling activities. The problems are not restricted to heavy manual industries, but occur in every working environment. The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 establish a clear hierarchy of measures:- avoid hazardous manual handling operations, assess any operations that cannot be avoided and reduce the risk of injury as far as reasonably



practicable, giving consideration to a number of solutions such as using mechanical assistance and providing training to personnel.

Training is often provided to site, workshop or warehouse staff, but is often not provided to office workers, despite there being a legal duty to do so in many instances.

We can provide short manual handling training courses, tailored to your particular needs. Feel free to contact us for more information.

## PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF SWINE 'FLU

As cases of Swine Flu become more prevalent, increasing awareness of good office hygiene practices can help to reduce the spread of infection. Influenza viruses can live up to two days on hard surfaces, it is therefore important to regularly clean sinks, handles, railings, objects and counters with a disinfectant wipe. Influenza viruses are rendered inactive by an effective disinfectant and cleaning the surfaces that employees frequently touch (preferably daily) will keep on killing new virus spores that may land on the surface.

Examples of such surfaces are:

- Door handles (especially toilet door handles)
- Desks
- Kitchen benches and cupboard handles
- Telephones
- Microwave oven controls
- Telephones
- Keyboards

Our workspaces provide the perfect breeding ground for germs to spread and the average desk harbours 400 times more bacteria than the average toilet seat, with telephones the worst places for bacteria to breed. Maintaining a clean work environment is therefore vital in helping to reduce the spread of virus and bacteria during the coming months.

- Don't eat at your desk - this can introduce bacteria from your desk to your body via your mouth.
- Wash coffee mugs and glasses in hot water on a regular basis. Don't just rinse under tap.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and put the used tissue in a rubbish bin or in a plastic bag.
- Wash and dry your hands often using warm water and

soap - especially after coughing or sneezing.

- Remind staff not to share utensils i.e. cups, dishes and cutlery.
- Ensure that these items are thoroughly washed with soap and hot water after use.
- Always wash your hands after using a computer or hot desk that someone else has used on the same day.

Swine flu symptoms are similar to those of ordinary influenza, including sudden onset of cough or fever, sore throat, headache, chills, aching muscles, difficulty breathing and tiredness. If you have some of these symptoms, but no fever, it is unlikely you have swine flu. If you think you might have swine flu, you should contact your doctor or seek advice from NHS Direct on treatment (0845 4647). Do not go to your GP's surgery unless you have been specifically advised to do so.

Useful resources

- NHS Direct - health advice now <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>
- Directgov guidance [http://direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG\\_177831](http://direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177831)
- NHS pandemic flu advice <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pandemic-flu/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- Health Protection Agency advice <http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&Page&HPAwebAutoListName/Page/1240732817665?p=1240732817665>
- World Health Organisation <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office - travel advice <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/>

*This article was kindly provided by Jean Fisher of Insync Corporate Health, our recommended provider of occupational health services. [www.insynchealth.co.uk](http://www.insynchealth.co.uk)*

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## In Brief

### KEEPING AN EYE ON ASBESTOS

If you own, occupy, manage or have responsibilities for premises which may contain asbestos, you have a legal duty to manage the risks associated with that extremely hazardous substance.



HSE have produced a free booklet entitled "A Short Guide to Managing Asbestos in Premises". We have a limited number of these booklets available, or you can order direct from HSE Books (01787 881165).