



MSU-ES Dawg Tracks

January, 2012



Safety Tips:
Office



The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) accumulated data that shows 80,410 private industry and administrative employees suffered on-the-job injuries in 2008. Many of these injuries could have been prevented had their employers or supervisors recognized the risks and installed simple safety techniques that could have mitigated some of these injuries. Following are some steps that can be taken to reduce and even eliminate the potential for injuries:

Falls-

Slips, Trips & Falls - The most common type of office injury sidelined 25,790 workers in 2008 according to the BLS. The National Safety Council states that employees are 2.5 times more apt to suffer a disabling fall in an office than anywhere else. The hazards contributing to office falls can be significantly reduced by making employees aware of the causes:

- ✓ **Stay Clutter-free** – Boxes, periodicals and other papers piled in walkways of aisles and desks easily create trip hazards. Computer and phone lines in the pathways to desks have been the culprit of several WC claims. Both of these problems can be eliminated with organization of the boxes and other materials in pathways, and power lines can be easily mitigated with strip covers.
- ✓ **Step up on** – Chairs used for ladders, especially rolling office chairs is a significant fall hazard. Always use a stepladder and do not climb past the rung that indicates the highest safety level.
- ✓ **Maintain a clear line of vision** – Employees can collide when making turns or carrying loads with their eyesight obstructed. The NSC recommends installing convex mirrors at all corners to assist in reducing collisions. Carry loads straight away with heights that will allow vision ahead.
- ✓ **Get a grip** – Carpeting and other skid-resistant materials will help to reduce falls. Small carpets placed at entryways greatly enhance the safety of persons entering walkways of buildings.
- ✓ **Shut the drawer** – File cabinets and desk drawers are hazards in the making when left open - either as a stumbling hazard or tipping over. Caution all employees to always close drawers.
- ✓ **Safe stacking** – Boxes and other periodicals should be stacked with extreme care and not too high so that if they fall no one will get hurt. Heavy objects especially should be stacked close to the floor for the obvious reasons.
- ✓ **Provide adjustable equipment** – One size doesn't fit in an office environment. Chairs, desks, work surfaces should all be adjustable to accommodate a wide range of employees' needs. Obviously, it is impossible to have these items all adjustable, but as much as can be had will greatly reduce the potential of medical claims for folks that experienced discomfort or injury from improper furniture.

- ✓ **Train employees on how to use the equipment** – Assuming that adjustable equipment is available, it isn't going to help if they don't know how to adjust it to their needs. It is our responsibility to show them how to make the adjustments and what positions are best for their physical build.
- ✓ **Keep your feet on the floor** – Does the employee's feet touch the floor? A simple question, but often a worker has to jack his chair up to reach the keyboard or a work tray, resulting in their feet barely or not touching the floor. Ergonomic engineers say that unless feet touch the floor, there is pain and discomfort. They recommend adjustable keyboard trays or rolling tables. A second option is footrests, which are okay for some, but due to size of some workers, it impedes their movement.
- ✓ **Provide document holders** – Document holders relieve neck strain caused from moving the head and neck from the computer screen to the document - lying flat on a desk.
- ✓ **Correct mouse placement** – Some workstations have a keyboard tray and the mouse on the desk's top. They recommend the mouse to be placed and used by the side of the keyboard.
- ✓ **Dim the lights & use task lamps** – Fluorescent lights sometimes are too bright for good vision. Some companies remove some of the bulbs to soften light, others use task lamps with the bulbs recessed in the fixture to avoid spots on the documents.
- ✓ **Correctly position monitors** – It is recommended that monitors should be slightly below eye level and 20 to 26 inches from your eyes.
- ✓ **Minimize screen glare** – Screen glare is a major cause of eye strain. To minimize strain, keep the monitor away from open windows and close shades or blinds.
- ✓ **Maintain cords in good repair** – Ungrounded power cords pose a serious fire hazard and violate safety codes. Inspect cords regular for cuts and frays. Make sure that the ground prong is in place and that extension cords are used only temporary. The most common cause of fires started by extension cords are improper use and overloading.
- ✓ **Inspect space heaters** – If employees use space heaters, make sure they are laboratory approved and are equipped with a switch that cuts off the power if it is tipped over. The Miss. electrical code and MSU policy requires all portable heaters to be disconnected at the close of each work day.
- ✓ **Never block fire protection equipment, escape routes or main electrical circuit boxes.** Sprinkler heads must have 18 inch clearance; fire extinguishers must be clear of obstruction or obstacles; and the circuit boxes are required to have 36 inches of clearance around all sides of the boxes. Fire doors must remain closed and not propped open with chairs or other obstacles.