

North Dakota State University

Office Safety

I. Introduction

A large percentage of workplace accidents and injuries occur in offices. Like the shop or laboratory, the office requires preventive measures to ensure a safe and healthy environment.

II. Purpose

To reduce the hazards found in office areas and provide guidelines for a safe work environment.

III. Goals

To provide a safe operating procedure that maximized personal safety while performing the duties required of employment at NDSU.

IV. Procedures

Thinking and working safely can prevent most incidents/adverse events. You can become aware of the most common hazards in the office environment. The following are some examples of common work place hazards and what you can do to prevent them from becoming serious injury accidents.

A. Common Causes of Office Accidents

1. Slipping, tripping and falling hazards
2. Burning, cutting and pinching hazards
3. Improper lifting and handling techniques
4. Failure to remain attentive and follow procedures
5. Improper office layout and arrangement
6. Dangerous electrical wiring and cords
7. Exposure to toxic substances
8. Horseplay
9. Lack of training

B. Good Housekeeping Practices

Many office accidents are caused by insufficient housekeeping practices. By keeping the office floor both neat and clean, you can eliminate most slipping, tripping, and falling hazards. Other good housekeeping practices include the following:

1. Ensure that office lighting is adequate. Replace burned out light bulbs and have additional lighting installed, as necessary.
2. Ensure that electrical cords and phone cords do not cross walkways or otherwise pose a tripping hazard. If you cannot move a cord, have a new outlet installed, or secure the cord to the floor with cord covering strips. Do not run cords underneath carpet, and avoid the use of tape.
3. Report or repair tripping hazards such as defective tiles, boards, or carpet immediately.
4. Clean spills and pick up fallen debris immediately. Even simple items such as a loose pencil could cause a serious falling injury.
5. Keep office equipment, facilities, and machines in good, clean condition.

6. Store items in an approved storage space. Take care to not stack boxes too high or too tight. Clearly label boxes with their contents.
7. Keep all drawers and cupboard doors closed when unattended.

C. Chemical Hazards

Many common office chemicals can cause injuries if improperly used, stored or disposed of. Some common office chemicals include: cleaning agents, glues, correction fluid, inks and toners.

To guarantee the safe use, storage, and disposal of the chemicals in your office, always review the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) and/or container label for important information.

D. Cuts and Punctures

Cuts and punctures happen when people use everyday office supplies without exercising care. Follow these guidelines to help reduce the chance for cuts and punctures:

1. When sealing envelopes, use a liquid dispenser, not your tongue.
2. Be careful when using kitchen knives, scissors, staplers, letter openers and box openers. Any of these items could cause a serious injury.
3. Do not pick up broken glass with your bare hands. Wear gloves and use a broom and a dustpan.
4. Place used blades, broken glass, or other sharp objects in a rigid container, such as a box, before disposing in a wastebasket.

E. Equipment Safety

Only use machines that you know how to operate. Never attempt to operate an unfamiliar machine without reading the machine instructions or receiving directions from a qualified person. In addition, follow these guidelines to ensure machine safety:

1. Secure machines that tend to unexpectedly move during operation.
2. Do not place machines near the edge of a table or desk.
3. Ensure that machines with moving parts are guarded to prevent accidents. Do not remove these guards.
4. Unplug defective machines, place "Out of Order" signs on them, and have them repaired immediately.
5. Do not use any machine that smokes, sparks, shocks, or appears defective.
6. Close hand-operated paper cutters after each use.
7. Take care when working with copy machines. If you have to open the machine for maintenance, repair or troubleshooting, remember that some parts may be hot. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for troubleshooting.

8. Unplug paper shredders before conducting maintenance, repair or troubleshooting.
9. Do not overload wall sockets and surge protectors. Extension cords are not allowed and should be for temporary use only. Do not daisy chain cords or surge protectors.
10. Common office machines, such as the following, require special safety considerations: copiers, microwaves, adding machines, typewriters and computers. Be sure you know how to operate these machines before using them, and never use one of these machines if you think it is defective.

F. File Cabinets and Shelves

Because file cabinets and shelves tend to support heavy loads, treat them with special care. Follow these safety guidelines for file cabinets:

1. Secure file cabinets that are not weighted at the bottom.
2. Ensure that file cabinet drawers cannot easily be pulled clear of the cabinet.
3. Do not block room ventilation grates with file cabinets.
4. Open only one drawer at a time to keep the cabinet from toppling.
5. Close drawers when they are not in use.
6. Do not place heavy objects on top of cabinets. Be aware that anything on top of a cabinet may fall off if a drawer is opened suddenly.
7. Close drawers slowly using the handle to avoid pinched fingers.
8. Keep the bottom drawer full. This will help stabilize the entire cabinet.
9. In addition, follow these safety guidelines for office shelves:
 - a. Ensure shelves are secured.
 - b. Place heavy objects on the bottom shelves. This will keep the entire structure more stable.
 - c. Maintain 18 inches between top shelf items and the plane of the fire suppression sprinkler heads. In non-sprinkler areas, 24 inches must be maintained from top shelf items and the ceiling.
 - d. Do not block room ventilation grates with shelves.
 - e. Never climb on shelves (even lower shelves). Use an approved ladder or stepstool.

G. Desks

Follow these safety guidelines for office desks:

1. Keep desks in good condition (i.e., free from sharp edges, nails, etc.)
2. Ensure that desks do not block exits or passageways.
3. Ensure that glass-top desks do not have sharp edges.
4. Do not climb on desks. Use an approved ladder or stepstool.
5. Keep desk drawers closed when not in use.
6. Repair or report any desk damage that could be hazardous.

H. Chairs

Safety guidelines for office chairs include the following:

1. Do not lean back in office chairs, particularly swivel chairs with rollers.
2. Never climb on a chair. Use an approved ladder or stepstool.
3. Office desk chairs should have adjustable back supports and seat height.
4. Make sure that your chair's back support position and seat height are comfortable.
5. Take care when sitting in a chair with rollers. Make sure it does not roll out from under you when you sit down.
6. Repair or report any chair damage that could be hazardous.
7. Do not roll chairs over electrical cords.

I. Ladders and Stepstools

Always use an approved ladder or stepstool to reach any item above your extended arm height. Never use a makeshift device, such as a desktop, file cabinet, bookshelf, chair or box as a substitute for a ladder or stepstool. Follow these guidelines when using ladders/stepstools:

1. Do not load ladders or stepstools above their intended capacity.
2. Place ladders or stepstools on slip-free surfaces even if they have slip-resistant feet.
3. Avoid placing ladders or stepstools in walkways, and never place them in front of a door, unless the door is locked and barricaded.
4. Conduct safety checks of ladders periodically to ensure they are structurally sound and in good repair.
5. Remove or destroy ladders with missing or broken parts.

J. Slips, Trips and Falls

The easiest way to avoid slips, trips and falls is to pay attention to your surroundings and to avoid running or rushing. Additionally, you can improve the flow of office traffic by following these guidelines:

1. Arrange office furnishings in a manner that provides unobstructed areas for movement. Do not block exits.
2. Keep stairs, steps, flooring and carpeting well maintained.
3. Ensure that glass doors have some type of marking to keep people from walking through or into them.
4. Clearly mark any difference in floor level that could cause an accident.
5. Secure throw rugs and mats.
6. Do not place wastebaskets or other objects in walkways.
7. Close file drawers when you leave the cabinet.
8. Wear proper footwear, slowdown and pay attention to your surroundings.
9. Properly place handrails in accordance with specific standards.
10. Walk, do not run or rush up or down stairs, and use handrails.

K. Preventing Stress

To reduce stress and prevent fatigue, it is important to take mini-breaks throughout the day. If possible, change tasks at least once every two hours. Stretch your arms, neck and legs often if you do the same type of work for long periods of time. Rest your eyes often by closing them or looking at something other than the work at hand. For a quick pick-me-up, breathe deeply several times by inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. In addition, try eating your lunch somewhere other than at your desk.

Other examples of stress-relieving exercises that can be done at your desk include the following:

Head and Neck Stretch:

Slowly turn your head to the left and hold it for three seconds. Slowly turn your head to the right and hold it for three seconds. Drop your chin gently towards your chest, and then tilt it back as far as you can. Repeat these steps five to ten times.

Shoulder Roll:

Roll your shoulders forward and then backward using a circular motion.

Upper Back Stretch:

Grasp one arm below the elbow and pull gently towards the other shoulder. Hold this position for five seconds and then repeat with the other arm.

Wrist Wave:

With your arms extended in front of you, raise and lower your hands several times.

Finger Stretch:

Make fists with your hands and hold tight for one second, then spread your fingers wide for five seconds.

L. Ergonomic and Work Station Arrangements – Also see Ergonomics Program

Ergonomics involves adjusting work processes or stations to fit a particular employee. Improper ergonomic design can cause debilitating, long-term musculoskeletal effects.

Suggestions for maintaining an ergonomic work atmosphere:

1. Stay in good physical condition.
2. Take "mini" breaks and stretch intermittently in both sitting and standing positions.
3. Change tasks frequently.
4. Adjust your computer screen to limit glare and take frequent vision breaks away from your computer to allow your eyes to fully relax. Periodically

gazing across the room or out a window will help the eye muscles rest and receive oxygenated blood.

5. Keep items frequently used in close proximity to you.
6. Maintain good posture and use a chair with adequate support to adjust your upper extremities to a neutral position.
7. Be aware of cumulative trauma disorder warning signs such as tingling, numbness or burning pain in fingers, hands, arms, wrists and shoulders.

Report any symptoms to your supervisor immediately and request an Ergonomic Assessment through the NDSU University Police & Safety Office, 231-7759.

M. Space Heaters

The use of portable electric space heaters should always be a last resort. If your workspace is too cold, your first action should always be to report the problem to the Facilities Management at 231-7911.

When necessary, the use of portable electric space heaters is allowed in University buildings. When used improperly, space heaters are an accident waiting to happen. They can cause fires, electric shocks, and can reduce oxygen levels. Fuel fired space heaters (e.g., natural gas, kerosene, propane, fuel oil, etc.) are prohibited in office settings. The following apply when using portable electric space heaters:

1. Use only for the purpose for which they are designed (refer to manufacturer's labeling and recommendations)
2. The heater must be Underwriters Laboratory or Factory Mutual approved and **must be purchased through Central Stores.**
3. The space heater must have devices that automatically turn it off if tipped over and when the room is warmed.
4. Keep the heater in a stable, upright position with at least 30 inches of space between the front of the unit and any other surface.
5. Never operate the heater in a closed area, such as beneath furniture, in cabinets, beneath/behind curtains, drapes, or other combustibles (i.e., paper, cardboard, etc.). Never hang a portable heater from a wall or ceiling.
6. Check the cord to make sure it is not frayed or worn.
7. Always plug heater into its own outlet.
8. Always unplug heaters when they are not in use.
9. Do not overload electrical circuits.
10. Never touch an electric heater if your hands are wet or if you are in contact with water.

For any further questions regarding the use of portable electric space heaters, contact Safety Office at 231-7759.

N. Fire

Follow the NDSU Emergency Action Guide and Safety & Security Manual

1. Candles are prohibited in NDSU buildings.

2. Smoking is not allowed on NDSU property
3. Know the location of the fire extinguishers.
4. In the event of a fire – activate the nearest alarm.
5. Call 911 – give your name, location of the fire and type of fire.
6. Do not use the elevators, keep to the right, walk do not run and remain calm.
7. Assemble at your predetermined designated assembly point, 50 feet away from the building.

O. Asbestos Awareness

Asbestos are naturally occurring minerals in a fiber form and were used in products for fireproof insulating materials such as: floor tile, ceiling tile, mastic, acoustic insulation and thermal insulation.

Asbestos has been implicated as a safety hazard. Fibers can be inhaled or ingested through airborne particles and can become embedded in the tissues of the respiratory or digestive systems. The symptoms generally do not appear for 20 or more years after initial exposure.

Important! Avoid any activities that could damage asbestos containing materials.
Do not remove ceiling tiles or place nails in the walls or ceilings without contacting UP&SO at 231-7759 to determine if area is safe.

Additional Information to Know and Understand

[Emergency Action Guide Poster](#)

[Annual Security Report/Annual Fire Report](#)