



Hardfacts

Norwich Union Risk Services

Ref No 5004 (v4)

June 2006

Managing Health and Safety in Offices

Introduction

Whilst health and safety risks in offices may be viewed as minimal, it must be remembered that many simple accidents have serious consequences. Hazards in workplaces where machinery or chemicals are used are obvious, but in the office environment there can be similar risks, particularly when care is not exercised.

Legal duties

Regardless of the size of your business or the number of employees, you need to understand the basic legal framework. You have duties to:

- your employees (including trainees), wherever they are working
- those affected by your work, (neighbours or the public)
- visitors, contractors/agency staff
- people who use products you supply
- those who use your services.

In simple terms you have to take care of the people who may be affected by what you do, and what you don't do.

In law the main responsibility for health and safety lies with the employer who must provide a safe working environment and safe working methods. There are some specific items of legislation which you will be required to comply with.

These include:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

- The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992
- The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)
- The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases, and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)

The above may seem a formidable list but although accidents do happen in offices, the health and safety measures required only need to match the level of risk.

Common hazards

- Slips, trips and falls are the most common accidents in offices. The main causes are poor floor conditions, trailing leads, spillages, poor lighting, untidiness or failure to use correct access equipment.
- Fires caused by poorly maintained electrical installations and portable electrical equipment, storage of combustible items or waste next to electrical switchgear, discarded cigarette ends, etc.
- Manual handling of heavy boxes of photocopy paper or training equipment such as overhead projectors, televisions and videos or office furniture.
- Use of display screen equipment at poorly designed workstations for long periods of time.

Key Action Steps

You need to consider the following areas:

- **Registration** - Have you registered your business using form OSR1 (obtained from your enforcing authority)?
- **Information for employees** - Have you displayed the poster 'Health and Safety Law: what you should know?' This is required by law.
- **Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Certificate** - You must display your current certificate of insurance.
- **Safety Policy** - A written Health and Safety Policy is only required if you employ five or more people. The policy should be specific and relevant to your business.
- **Assessments** - The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 includes a duty to carry out assessments of risk. Written records must be kept if you have five or more employees. (See NURS Hardfacts Ref No 5010 for further information.)
- **Fire Safety** - You need to consider emergency procedures, testing of alarms, extinguishers and regular drills.
- **Electricity** - Review adequacy of volume of sockets and inspection procedures for electrical equipment.
- **COSHH** - These Regulations require you to control the risks from hazardous substances. In offices this usually relates to cleaning materials, toners, etc.
- **First Aid** - Do you have an appointed person to take charge in an emergency and an appropriately stocked first aid box?
- **Accident Reporting** - Are all accidents recorded in your accident book and reportable accidents notified on form F2508 to the enforcing authority?
- **Display Screen Equipment (VDUs)** - Assessments of workstations should be completed to ensure their suitability for use.

- **Workplace/Welfare** - Legislation gives general guidance on working temperature, toilet and washing facilities, space/person, etc, which need to be adhered to.
- **Contractors/Visitors** - Take into account competency of contractors, adequacy of insurance, security, notification of health and safety procedures to contractors.

References

- HSE Officewise - Ref IND(G) 173L, HSE Books 1994.

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Norwich Union Risk Services operates a Risk Helpline during normal business hours for the cost of a local telephone call. The telephone number is:
0845 366 66 66
www.nu-riskservices.co.uk