

## Hot-Desking – Health and Safety Considerations

“Hot-desking” is now a common feature in many office environments. The principle is that workstations are used to their maximum potential, particularly where an organisation has employees who are often away from the office, thereby leaving workstations empty for considerable periods of time. Smarter working and property rationalisation means that an increasing number of employees are coming into contact with this way of working.

In general terms a number of issues are due consideration when considering the use of hot-desking, their relevance will often be determined by the type of work being undertaken and the nature of the working model being applied.

Managers will need to consider the following:

- The need to ensure that an individual workstation assessment is carried out on each workstation being used.
- Where a specific piece of equipment has been identified as being necessary to create a safe workspace that the equipment will be available in all potential work locations.
- A mechanism exists to permit hygiene and cleanliness to be maintained when multiple users using the same pieces of equipment (such as telephones and keyboards)
- Psychological issues are taken on board when a team is no longer able to work in close proximity with each other
- Ability to manage a fire evacuation for those that may have mobility difficulty.

Workstation Assessments

Equipment Considerations

Cleaning/Hygiene

Psychological Implications

Fire Evacuation

Ability to bounce ideas off each other, a potential to feel isolated from work colleagues or supervisors, difficulties with adapting to the new regime or problems associated with the above points.

Don't underestimate the importance of team meetings and the need for employees to feel part of a group.

Increased occurrence of musculoskeletal disorders, stress and other health-related problems may occur in the workforce as a result of the points outline above. One solution is to provide workstations that are adaptable to as great a number of users as is reasonably practicable, through good procurement and purchasing processes.



There may be occasions when specialist equipment is required for a particular individual, either due to the work undertaken or due to individual medical or ergonomic requirements. In such circumstances, consideration will have to be given as to how this may be accommodated into the hot-desking regime.

A system must be introduced that enables users to undertake self-analysis of the workstation, which should be reinforced by initial instruction and training, as well as by making available user-friendly information and guidance on analysis and good posture.

In respect of cleanliness and hygiene, a clear desk policy should be introduced. It may be advisable to introduce local hygiene procedures by providing antiseptic wipes/gel sprays for staff to use on telephones and keyboards.

To alleviate the potential psychological issues associated with hot-desking, employers can:

- make employees aware of how to utilise any systems, such as telephone pre-booking of the hot desk, fault reporting procedures, etc
- introduce “team zones” that allows teamwork and continuing knowledge sharing, so employees can work with others familiar to them
- design-in quiet areas or cubicles to allow employees to work on confidential items or concentrate on pieces of work.

Hot-desking, the system in which no one desk in the workplace is allocated to a single person regardless of seniority, is being used across more council properties.

While hot-desking may be appropriate for staff members who are rarely in the office, there are health and safety implications for staff who are required to attend every day which are frequently overlooked in the desire to reduce office space and save property costs. These include the need to:

- complete a workstation analysis and set up the workstation for employees’ particular needs
- provide the most appropriate equipment that can be adjusted to each individual’s requirements
- deal with hygiene and cleanliness issues arising from multiple users using the same pieces of equipment (such as telephones and keyboards)

- address psychological issues, such as isolation from colleagues or supervisors

This includes setting up the workstation to suit each individual person's needs, managing hygiene issues that arise as a result of multiple people using the same equipment (including keyboards and telephones), completing a workplace analysis and addressing any psychological issues, like isolation from managers and other colleagues.

*While hot-desking may be suitable for staff whose work is mostly outside the office, for this approach to work for those in regular attendance, it would require substantial investment in technology and equipment which can be suitably adapted for the height and reach of individual workers.*

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