Corporate Health and Safety
Guidance Document

GD 2 – Workplace Safety Guide

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Introduction:

This guide applies to all Council workplaces and is supplemented by a range of topic specific arrangement sections and guidance documents. In the main this document will apply to office led activities.

Historically, the office has been considered a relatively safe and healthy place to work. This guide discusses the areas of concern related to health and safety in the office. Accidents that occur in offices are frequently due to poorly designed office environments and improper office procedures. Almost every work activity taking place within the Council will be controlled by someone based in an office and the principals outlined here will equally apply. Risk assessment is the foundation of effective health and safety management.

Accident rates decline when workers are informed of potential hazards and safe work practices. Training regarding general safety precautions for work reduces both the number and severity of accidents this applies to office and non office based work.

Office workers are increasingly sensitive to the effects of display screen equipment (DSE) upon their health and safety. Individuals who use computers commonly report stress-related and musculoskeletal disorders. If such disorders are to be reduced, computer workstations must accommodate the needs of office workers. Those working away from the office will be more concerned with lone working, manual handling and perhaps verbal abuse.

The office surroundings has been known to raise concerns amongst office workers. Such factors as improper temperature, inadequate humidity, and even colours of walls and furnishings are now known to be sources of discomfort. These are situations that should be considered in creating a safe, healthy and efficient office environment. Other factors will affect those working away from the office.

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1. Induction & Ongoing Training

As a manager, you are legally responsible for the health and safety of your employees. A high-quality health and safety induction for new employees is a key way of meeting your responsibilities. The ideal health and safety induction should:

- identify the major risks and hazards workers will face;
- focus on the best ways of reducing the probability of these occurring, and their impact if they occur;
- name the individuals responsible for key health and safety matters;
- give your employees an understanding of the processes for reviewing risks and ways to reduce those risks;
- emphasise that employees themselves share responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of their environment;
- not be excessively long;
- be regularly reviewed and updated.

It may seem that an office-based environment poses few risks - and indeed typically they will be fewer than, say, a factory floor or a timber yard. But fewer risks do not mean there are no risks. By the end of the induction programme your staff must have a clear understanding of the risks in your environment.

This induction process should be repeated on regular basis and include those that have been employed by the Council for some time. It is prudent to ensure a training/briefing programme exists for each office environment and all team members are actively involved in the programme. Online training and tool box talk materials are available via the Health and Safety pages of Connect.

2. Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are required by law.

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to take "reasonably practicable" precautions in various areas to safeguard employees. To do this an assessment of the risk and the steps needed to remove or reduce them needs to be made. This duty is further expanded upon with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and the associated guidance.
A health and safety risk assessment should exist for each work activity and should typically include the following steps:

1. Make a list of the work tasks that are your responsibility.
2. Identify the risks – what are the hazards, who might be harmed and how.
3. Estimate the risk.
4. Evaluate the risk.
5. Record and review your findings.

Line managers and supervisors will have access to trained risk assessors and will ensure all work activities are covered by a general risk assessment. Arrangement Section 4 (AS4) of the Health and Safety Policy provides more detail on general risk assessments and the importance of putting these in place.

3. Fire Safety in the Office

Offices are considered to be a low fire risk and fires usually occur as a result of carelessness. The level of risk varies as a result of the number of occupants and the time the premises are occupied. The four principle risks are:

- Electrical appliances can be a source of fire if they have been subjected to misuse. Faults can occasionally be found on electrical equipment because it has not been serviced or maintained. All electrical equipment should be tested regularly and staff kept informed of the possible dangers associated with the different types of equipment.

- Kitchens or tea rooms can be a risk, dependent on what has been provided, especially if food that is cooking is left unattended. Full dining facilities and kitchens are a high risk but this is lessened by having staff in attendance at all times.

- Higher fire risks are areas where electrical equipment such as photocopiers or computers are permanently on and have combustible materials stored close by e.g. stationery. Good housekeeping, equipment management and the use of effective detection will reduce the risk. Management processes must be discussed at team training sessions.

- Tradesmen on the premises, especially those that use apparatus that is capable of starting a fire, like blow lamps, gas torches, metal angle cutters, etc. You need to ensure a high degree of supervision with suitable fire fighting equipment available during and after their presence. Give the area they have been working in a thorough inspection and make sure no hot spots or small fires have been missed.

Fire training – All team members need to know what to do in the event of a fire. They should recognise the sound of the fire alarm, where their nearest fire exit is, and the location of the fire assembly point.

Each establishment is expected to have a fire risk assessment available and line managers/supervisors should be able to locate this document and advise the team about the significant risks associated with the workplace as well as arrange the correct level of training associated with the evacuation processes needed.

Further guidance can be obtained from Section 22 (AS22) of the Council's Health and Safety Policy (Fire Risk Assessment) and Guidance Document 28 (GD28) Fire Safety. Online awareness training and other relevant information sheets can be obtained from Connect.

4. Electrical Safety

Offices are generally considered 'low-risk' environments as far as electrical hazards are concerned. Although this is true, complacency must still be avoided. Electrical accidents do occur in offices with the potential to injure people via shocks or burns and represent one of the major causes of fires. For this reason it is important that equipment is kept in a safe condition, which is best ensured by an inspection and testing regime. This applies just as much to offices as it does to potentially more hazardous environments such as factories and building sites.

Requirements are based on principles of risk assessment and reasonable practicability. The level of inspection and testing required will vary greatly with the equipment and environment in which it is used.

Within every office there will be a register of electrical equipment that will be used to determine the type of inspection/testing that is required together with the necessary frequency. This register and its content must be reviewed on a regular basis (at least annually).

Further guidance and advice is available on the matter either via your Service Health and Safety team or from the following documents on Connect.

AS16 – Electricity in the Workplace
GD9 – Electrical Testing or Portable Equipment and Fixed Systems
GD22 - Safe Use of Electrical Extension Cables (or similar)
IS46 - Electrical Inspection and Testing

5. Manual Handling

Over one third of injuries requiring absence from work for three days are caused by manual handling related injuries. Types of injuries which can occur include:

- Sprains/Strains – from overexertion of muscles
- Fractures – usually by dropping objects onto feet
- Lacerations – from sharp edges
- Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD's) – back injuries, joint injuries etc.

Some of the above injuries are the result of one lift performed badly, usually involving a heavy object. However, performing a number of low weight lifts incorrectly over a period of time can have a cumulative and chronic effect. This means if someone always lifts incorrectly then each time they lift, they increase the risk of sustaining or aggravating an injury (especially an MSD).

The law requires the employer to remove the need to undertake manual handling. However it is recognised that not all tasks can be eliminated at that there will be a need for some manual handling to take place. Where manual handling is to take place then the significant risks need to be assessed and the necessary information, instruction and training provided in relation to the risk controls identified.

Common Objects Lifted in an Office

It might be might presumed that an office environment is free from manual handling issues but there are a number of heavy objects which require care. For example:

Object	Approximate Weight
Box of paper	12.5 kg
Water cooler bottle (full)	18.5 kg
Box of archive material	Dependant on contents
Cash (coins)	14 kg in RGU package

Manual Handling Risk Assessment

During the working day we may lift many objects and it would be impossible to conduct a formal written risk assessment for them all. Generally, in an administrative office, formal written manual handling risk assessments would not be expected (although a particular task may require it). Staff should still consider the basic factors involved in manual handling risk assessment, especially those who have control over the activities carried out in the office.

Those factors can be categorised as follows:

TASK	INDIVIDUAL
- Is it necessary? - How frequent is the task? - Is it repetitive? - Where is the load going? - What route will you take? – shortest with least obstructions - Will the task involve reaching twisting, bending or stooping?	- General physique and strength - Medical conditions *Bad back* *Bad knees* *Illness* - Expectant or nursing mother (no heavy lifting) - Fatigue
LOAD	**ENVIRONMENT**
- What is it? - How heavy is it – do we know? - What shape is it – is it awkward to carry? - Is it rigid or will it bend - Can it tear or burst? - Are there lifting instructions?	- Floor surface – slippery on uneven? - Are there constraints on posture? - Temperature - Lighting - Obstructions (including people)

A simple assessment based on the above factors shows us, generally speaking, that:

- Heavy loads should be broken down where possible (e.g. opening the box of paper and carrying the packets individually) will reduce the weight
- Heavy objects should be stored as close to where they are needed as possible
- Avoid storing heavy objects at height.

Further guidance and advice is available on the matter either via your Service Health and Safety team or from the following documents on Connect.

IS9 – Manual Handling
AS11 – Manual Handling of Loads

6. Display Screen Equipment

Display Screen Equipment (DSE) is sometimes referred to as Visual Display Units (VDU) or Computer Workstations and includes laptops, touch-screens and other similar devices that incorporate a display screen.

Any item of computer-related equipment including the computer, display, keyboard, mouse, desk and chair can be considered part of the DSE work station.
Other important definitions:

- *User:* an employee who habitually uses DSE as a significant part of their normal work. If someone uses DSE continuously for periods of an hour or more on most days worked, they are likely to be classified as a user.
- *Operator:* a self-employed worker who habitually uses DSE for a significant part of their work.

Many employers and employees are completely unaware of the impact on health that a poorly arranged work station can have. It is a major contributing factor in the development of many work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDs). Conditions can be both short and long term but in most cases cause a lot of avoidable pain, discomfort and stress. Other associated symptoms include temporary eyestrain and headaches, and fatigue/stress.

The hazards associated with DSE work stations must therefore be properly assessed so that they are adequately equipped and adjustable to suit the user's needs.

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 require employers to carry out an analysis and assessment of the work station. Work stations must meet certain basic requirements that enable them to be appropriately adjusted and used without unacceptable risks to health and safety.

Account must also be taken of daily work routines so that adequate breaks can be incorporated into the working day. This does not necessarily mean a complete break away from work, but a break from the DSE work (e.g. making phone calls, filing or other work that allows staff a change of activity and gets them away from the screen). It is better if the work allows for natural breaks but short frequent breaks are better than fewer longer breaks.

Appropriate information, instruction and training should be provided to users so that they can use the equipment provided effectively and information on eye examinations.

Free eye examinations for persons identified as users must be provided on request. The employer is responsible for paying for tests and for basic spectacles if they are required for DSE work.

Further guidance and advice is available on the matter either via your Service Health and Safety team or from the following documents on Connect.

IS9 – Manual Handling
AS10 – Display Screen Equipment
GD15 – Lighting Levels

7. Hazardous Substances

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) requires employers to protect staff and other people against health risks that may arise from working with hazardous substances. Managers must ensure that work is not undertaken with a hazardous substance unless a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks created by that work has been undertaken and suitable and sufficient control measures identified and implemented so as to reduce the risk to the lowest level reasonably practicable.

COSHH risk assessments must address the routine and non-routine aspects of the work and there must be emergency procedures. All workers, including students, must be properly informed, trained and supervised to enable them to safely and competently perform the work. COSHH risk assessments must be carried out by competent persons and the manager is responsible for ensuring the risks associated with the work are properly assessed and recorded. Examples of COSHH assessments carried out in office environments could include such things as exposure to photocopier toner dust, skin contact with ink or solvents, the use of correction fluids and certain cleaning products.

Further guidance and advice is available on the matter either via your Service Health and Safety team or from the following documents on Connect.

Log in to Learn – Chemical Safety
AS13 – Control of Substances Hazardous to Health
IS10 – Safe Disposal of Human Hygiene and First Aid Waste
IS15 – Blood Borne Viruses
IS37 – Cleaning for Infection Control

8. Temperature

The regulations require that during working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable. To help monitor this, a thermometer will be available.

The temperature in workrooms should normally be at least 16 degrees centigrade. Where work involves severe physical effort, then a temperature of 13 degrees centigrade will be seen as reasonable. There is no maximum working temperature. It is expected that employers will determine what is reasonable once the many local environmental and operational factors have been considered.

The Health and Safety Executive suggest that the following actions can assist in creating thermal comfort during hot weather:

- Putting insulating material around heat generating equipment or pipes;
- Ensuring that windows can be opened (they should not be opened past the building line where persons can walk past the window, and should not be opened in a fashion that would permit persons to fall out);
- Providing fans, e.g. desk, pedestal or ceiling-mounted fans;

- Shading windows with blinds or using reflective film to reduce the heating effect of the sun;
- Siting workstations away from direct sunlight and places or plant which radiate heat;
- Providing additional facilities, e.g. cold water dispensers (water is preferable to caffeine or carbonated drinks);
- Introducing work systems to limit exposure, such as flexible working patterns, e.g. early start/finish times;
- Introducing flexible working practices such as flexible hours or earlier starts to the working day to avoid the worst effects of working in exceptionally high temperatures;
- Providing air-cooling or air-conditioning plant;
- Relaxing formal dress codes
- Allowing sufficient breaks to enable employees to get cold drinks or to cool down.

The HSE go on to suggest ways of creating thermal comfort during periods of cold weather, this would include:

- providing adequate heating in the workplace or local heating such as temporary heaters (please note that temporary heaters will require you to review your fire risk assessment);
- reducing exposure to the cold by separating cold products or cold areas from areas where people are working;
- reducing draughts;
- providing the appropriate type of protective clothing.

If local managers have concerns about the thermal comfort then they should undertake a risk assessment and use this process to develop control measures that are relevant to the local conditions.

Further guidance and advice is available on the matter either via your Service Health and Safety team or from the following documents on Connect.

IS37 – Thermal Comfort

9. First Aid

People at work can suffer injury or sudden illness at any time. It is important that employers have made arrangements to ensure their employees receive immediate attention if they are injured or taken ill at work. First-aid treatment can save lives as well as helping someone recover more quickly after an accident.

When assessing the first-aid needs in your workplace consider the following:

- the nature of the work undertaken
- the hazards present – e.g. chemicals, machinery, processes etc
- the number of staff employed and their levels of experience
- the location of your workplace in relation to emergency medical services
- is there shift work , late night working or lone working
- the previous accident record in your workplace

The minimum first-aid that should be provided in any workplace is an appointed person, a suitably stocked first-aid box and information for employees about first aid arrangements. In small, low-risk work environments such as offices and shops you may only need the minimum provision. The number and types of first aiders will be determined through the risk assessment process.

What is an appointed person?

An appointed person is someone chosen to take charge in the event of an accident or if someone falls ill, including calling an ambulance if required. They also take charge of keeping the first-aid box fully stocked. Appointed persons should only attempt to give first-aid in line with any training they have been given. There are short courses which appointed persons can attend to help them deal with emergency situations.

What first-aider options exist?

There are 2 further levels of first aid provision available, either and Emergency First Aider or a full first-aider. An emergency first aider is someone that has attended a formal one day course and is trained to deal with injuries associated with low risk workplaces. A first aider is someone who has successfully undergone a training course (normally 3 days in duration) and continues to hold a valid certificate. First-Aid training should only be carried out by a training organisation which has been approved by HSE's Employment Medical Advisory Service (EMAS)

What should a first-aid box in the workplace contain?

There is no mandatory list of contents for first-aid boxes and HSE does not 'approve' or endorse particular products. Deciding what to include should be based on an employer's assessment of first-aid needs. As a guide, where work activities involve low hazards, a minimum stock of first-aid items might be:

- a leaflet giving general guidance on first aid, eg HSE's leaflet: Basic advice on first aid at work;
- 20 individually wrapped sterile plasters (assorted sizes), appropriate to the type of work (this can include hypoallergenic plasters, if necessary);
- two sterile eye pads;
- four individually wrapped triangular bandages, preferably sterile;
- six safety pins;
- two large, individually wrapped, sterile, unmedicated wound dressings;
- six medium-sized, individually wrapped, sterile, unmedicated wound dressings;
- a pair of disposable gloves (these should not be latex unless a local risk assessment suggests otherwise).

This is only a suggested contents list and local variations are expected, however tablets and medicines should not be kept in the first-aid box.

Further guidance and advice is available on the matter either via your Service Health and Safety team or from the following documents on Connect.

AS9 – First Aid
IS10 – Safe Disposal of Human Hygiene and First Aid Waste
IS15 – Blood Borne Viruses
IS36 – First Aid at Work – Gel Dressings
IS37 – Cleaning for Infection Control

10. HSE Law Poster

The HSE "What you should know" poster must be displayed in every workplace, these posters are available from HSE books by calling 01787 881165 and quoting the ISBN number ISBN 0 7176 24935

The poster has some boxes that must be completed and the following information may be of use:

Enforcement and Employment Medical Advisory Service (EMAS):

Health and Safety Executive/EMAS
1st Floor
Mercantile Chambers
53 Bothwell Street
Glasgow
G2 6TS

0141 275 3100

Source of Competent Advice:

Service Health and Safety Section – using Service contact details, or,

Principal Health and Safety Officer,
North Lanarkshire Council,
Civic Centre,
Motherwell,
ML1 1AB.

01698 302392.

Other information:

Other local information such as Trade Union contacts should be provided as the document/location requires.