

Office Safety: Management Briefing

Offices are generally low risk environments, but there still remains the potential for injury and ill health.

In the office, physical hazards may arise for example, from maintenance and alteration works, electrical equipment, trailing leads, space constraints and wet floors. Health hazards are a significant risk, in particular, stress and ergonomic factors. There are also the less frequently occurring hazards of fire and security threats which must be accounted for in risk management arrangements and emergency plans.

In many cases it will be reasonable to conduct a 'generic risk assessment' for all office areas, but it will be necessary to check that it fits the dangers in the particular office work area. A fire safety risk assessment will generally need to be a standalone document and take all aspects of fire safety and means of escape into account.

When carrying out an office risk assessment the key risk issues to consider are:

- display screen equipment
- manual handling
- slips, trips and falls
- noise
- temperature, lighting and ventilation
- welfare facilities
- fire safety and other emergencies
- electrical safety
- office chemicals
- Legionnaire's disease
- asbestos
- first aid
- controlling contractors
- working at height
- lifts
- stress
- artificial optical radiation (due to intense light or lasers)

Legal duties

The main areas of health and safety law relevant to office safety are:

- 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 Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- The Manual Handling Operation Regulations 1992
- The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002
- The Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002
- The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Electricity at Work Regulations 1989
- The Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 (as amended)
- The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996

- The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013

- The Smoke-free (Premises and Enforcement) Regulations 2006

- The Smoke-free (Signs) Regulations 2012

Recommendations for employers:

- carry out a generic risk assessment of all activities
- ensure DSE assessments are undertaken and relevant controls implemented
- assess manual handling risks and implement suitable and sufficient controls
- make sure that temperature, lighting and ventilation provision complies with legal requirements
- ensure adequate sanitary, washing and changing facilities are provided
- make sure a fire risk assessment is carried out by a competent person and the recommendations implemented
- make sure smoking is prohibited within the office and statutory no smoking signs are displayed in accordance with country legislation
- ensure portable electrical appliances are periodically inspected and tested
- make sure hazardous substances are used and stored in accordance with COSHH/DSEAR
- assess any risk of Legionnaire's disease and implement relevant controls
- identify any asbestos containing materials with a professional survey and produce and implement an asbestos management plan
- ensure suitable and sufficient first aid facilities are provided, including trained first aid personnel
- assess work at height risks
- ensure safety requirements for lifts are in place, including arrangements for the release of trapped persons
- ensure that there are adequate accident reporting and first aid provisions.

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