

# Office Safety Guidelines

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Environmental Health, Safety, and Risk Management Department

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## **Introduction**

This program is designed to help office employees recognize common health and safety hazards in the workplace and take steps to avoid injury and harm. While they may not seem like a dangerous place, many accidents and injuries occur daily in office settings. Small tasks such as using a keyboard, handling paper, entering or exiting a room can cause an injury if one is not cautious. Pay close attention, make changes as necessary and you will find your day at the office much safer and enjoyable.

## **OFFICE SAFETY GUIDELINES**

1. Heavy objects should be kept off the top of file cabinets and other furniture with elevated surfaces. Movable objects, such as flowerpots, vases, and bottles should not be placed on windowsills or ledges.
2. Misuse of filing cabinets is a major source of office injuries. Only one file drawer in the cabinet should be opened at a time to prevent the cabinet from toppling over.
3. Electrical office equipment of any kind should be properly grounded using a double insulated three-wire grounding system plug to reduce the likelihood of electrical shock.
4. Never unplug an electrical device from an outlet using by pulling the power cord. Always grasp the plug to remove the device from the receptacle.
5. Make sure electric outlet boxes are not exposed. Report all broken outlet covers to the Physical Plant department.
6. Frayed electrical cords should be reported immediately to a supervisor and replaced.
7. Use of extension cords as a permanent power source is strictly prohibited.
8. If you ever suffer even a mild shock when you touch an office machine, or if you see an office machine giving off smoke or sparks, unplug it only if it can be done safely and contact the Physical Plant department to request repairs. At the same time, post a sign near/on the machine saying that it is out of order and dangerous.
9. Keep electrical cords out of walkways. If there are no other receptacle choices and your electrical cord passes across a walkway, cover the cord with a warning bumper, mat or rug to prevent tripping hazards.
10. Never leave scissors, pens, pencils, or any other sharp pointed object on a desk with the point toward the user.
11. Never exchange sharp pointed objects to anyone point first.
12. Don't leave objects on the edge of a desk or table where they can easily be pushed off.
13. Qualified maintenance employees should be the only employees moving desks or files with dollies made for heavy lifting. Contact the Physical Plant department to schedule assistance from special services.
14. Never stand on an open file drawer or climb on shelves to grasp materials that would otherwise be out of reach. Use a step stool or ladder.
15. Never test a jammed stapler with your thumb over the business end.
16. Always remove staples with a staple remover, not your fingernails.

17. If you have to carry materials through a doorway, make sure there is adequate clearance on the sides and at the top.
18. Do not reach into a desk drawer for pencils, pens, or other objects without looking.
19. Paper cutters should be properly guarded for maximum protection. Lock the blade handle when you are finished using the paper cutter.

### **Slips, Trips and Falls**

Slips, trips and falls are one of the most common sources of injuries in the workplace, but are also the easiest hazards to prevent.

1. Slips are commonly caused by wet surfaces. Always caution others of spills and wet surfaces by immediately “marking” the area with wet floor signs. Take immediate steps to clean the area or notify the Physical Plant Department. Marking and cleaning up wet surfaces immediately will prevent some workplace injuries.
2. Outside entry ways are especially susceptible to being wet during adverse weather conditions. It is best to have non-slip mats located just outside the door break and carpeted mats inside all entry ways to wipe your shoes on as you enter from outside.
3. Not all slips are caused by the surface itself, but may be caused by the employee’s shoes. Employees should wear slip resistant shoes whenever possible, especially those working in areas which are prone to be wet.
4. Defective floors, rugs, and floor mats are tripping hazards and should be immediately reported to maintenance for repairs or, if possible, removed until they can be replaced. Place warning signs around the area until it is safe to traverse.

### **Fire Safety:**

1. Keep aisles, paths of egress, and work places clear. Keep materials neatly organized and located away from high traffic areas.
2. KEEP EXITS CLEAR AT ALL TIMES. Fire doors SHALL NEVER be blocked or otherwise made inoperative. If you need to keep a fire exit door open have magnetic locks installed to maintain compliance with Fire Code regulations.
3. Keep stairways and landings clear and free from materials that could cause a tripping hazard.
4. Locate fire extinguishers, and learn how to use them. Memorize where the emergency exits are located. Know your nearest primary fire escape route, and a secondary exit. You should also become familiar with where and how to use or activate the fire alarm system and other firefighting equipment in emergencies.
5. If your emergency exit involves a stairway, note the location of the stairway as you are leaving in case you need to communicate this to the first responder.

### **LIFTING AND BACK SAFETY:**

1. Be sure you have a good footing then lift with a smooth even motion; don't jerk on a load.
2. Remove greasy substances from the hands before attempting to lift.

3. When lifting heavy objects, shift the load or your body until you are in position to make a straight lift. Never lift while in an awkward position.
4. When making a lift from the floor, keep your arms and back straight, and bend your knees, keeping load close to your body, then lift using your leg muscles.
5. Always ask for help if the load is too heavy or the shape of the item is awkward and cannot be safely handled by one person.

### **EYE STRAIN:**

Office employees tend to spend many hours in front of computer screens, projector screens, phones, and tablets which can cause eye strain. Other possible sources of eye strain include reading for long periods of time, poor lighting, excessive lighting and incorrect prescription glasses. Eye strain can cause painful headaches, blurred vision and burning in the eyes. Just as it is necessary to give other parts of your body rest breaks you should also do the same for your eyes. The following are some steps you can take to reduce eye strain at work:

1. Adjust the lighting to maximize illumination and minimize glare; take breaks and step away from the task. Stretch your arms, back, neck and legs. Walk to other areas and allow your eyes to focus on different objects at different distances;
2. Briefly look away from the task into other rooms or out a window;
3. Consciously blink several times
4. Adjust the distance of your computer screen or reading material from your eyes. You can also increase the text size on your computer

### **BASIC SAFETY STANDARDS**

1. Employees should report to work rested, alert and fit to give full attention to their job.
2. No one is expected to take risks on their jobs. The common sense, safe way, is always the best way to do a job.
3. Texting and personal phone calls are prohibited in vehicles and other heavy machinery. Texting and driving is illegal in Texas. Injuries caused by lack of attention because of texting or personal phone calls will be considered personal time and will not be covered under the University Workers' Compensation insurance.
4. Report all accidents to your supervisor immediately to help correct problems.
5. Document all injuries, within 24 hours, on the Safety Department website, using the 24-hour accident and injury reporting link.
6. Employees should report to their supervisor, any medication that may affect their job performance PRIOR to beginning work.
7. Learn the correct way to do your job safely.
8. Employees are urged to make suggestions that will assist in the safe performance of their work.