

Appendix A

Potential office safety problems and considerations

Ergonomic considerations

(Further information is available in Guidance Note HSP/D1 Display Screen Equipment)

- 1 Ergonomics involves arranging the environment to fit the person. In the workplace, ergonomics helps to adapt the job to fit the person, rather than force the person to fit the job. Adapting the job to fit the worker can help reduce stress and eliminate many potential injuries and disorders associated with the overuse of muscles, bad posture, and repetitive motion.
- 2 Assistance with office ergonomic design, or redesign, can be obtained by calling the Open University Occupational Health and Safety Department, and scheduling an appointment for a workplace assessment.

Electrical equipment

(Further information is available in Guidance Note HSP/E1 Electrical Safety)

- 1 Electrically operated equipment can be hazardous in offices. It must be properly used and maintained, especially items which are moved frequently.
- 2 Frayed electrical cords, loose or broken electrical wires, broken outlet covers and receptacles and worn or broken electrical plugs are dangerous and should be repaired or replaced before being used again. Please refer to HSP Electrical Guidance Note.
- 3 Moisture and electricity do not mix. Placing liquids on or around electrical equipment (such as computers, radios, copiers, printers or microwaves) increases the risk of electrocution if the liquid spills and gets into the electrical equipment. This includes wet or sweaty hands.
- 4 Do not block electrical panel doors. If an electrical malfunction should occur, the panel door, and anything else in front of the door, will become very hot.
- 5 Electrical panel doors should always be kept closed, to prevent 'electrical flashover' in the event of an electrical malfunction.

Falls

- 1 Falling while attempting to retrieve something from a high office shelf accounts for a large percentage of the Open University's reported accidents.
- 2 Always use a ladder or step stool to retrieve anything above shoulder level.
- 3 Ladders, or step stools, should be sturdy and not have any broken rungs or legs.
- 4 Do not lean too far back in chairs. This may result in overbalancing and a fall.
- 5 Swivel chairs are not acceptable ladder substitutes.
- 6 Cardboard boxes are not acceptable ladder substitutes.
- 7 Upright waste bins are not acceptable ladder substitutes.

Filing cabinets/bookcases

- 1 Filing cabinets and bookcases can be dangerous if used incorrectly.
- 2 In the case of four-drawer filing cabinets, the second drawer from the bottom should be filled before the others to weight the bottom and to prevent it from tilting over.
- 3 Drawers and doors should be returned to the closed position when not in use so as to prevent bumping and tripping. Under no circumstances should more than one drawer, or door, at a time be open.
- 4 Filing cabinets and/or bookcases should be placed where their use will not interfere with office traffic patterns.
- 5 Filing cabinets or bookcases taller than 1.5 metres should be secured or anchored to the wall to prevent toppling over.

Fire safety

(Further information is available in Guidance Note HSP/F2 Fire Safety)

- 1 Every office should consider fire or other emergency hazards and plan for escape in the event of an emergency.
- 2 Every office should post accepted evacuation routes in conspicuous places and have at least one practice office evacuation drill per school year.
- 3 A predetermined emergency meeting place should be established so that an office head count can be taken after the office is evacuated. This will help determine who may or may not still be in the building for the emergency response personnel.
- 4 Office doors should always be free of obstructions, to permit egress in case of an emergency.
- 5 All new office employees should be trained in the accepted evacuation practices for the office.
- 6 Everyone should be aware that there are a surprising number of flammable materials used in offices. They can be innocent-looking products, such as glue, whiteout, and fingernail polish or cleaning solvents.
- 7 Remember that you should not smoke when using these materials. The air around the open container can be full of flammable vapours, which, if they come into contact with the high temperature of the cigarette end, could ignite and explode.
- 8 Wastepaper baskets are another fire danger; all too often lit cigarettes or burning matches are thrown into them. There is a no smoking rule in place for all Open University buildings, except in designated areas.

Guillotines

- 1 Paper cutters are guillotines and are very hazardous pieces of equipment. Whether operated by mechanical power or not, guillotines must be adequately guarded at all times. When not in use, the blade should be in the fully down position and fastened securely.
- 2 All offices having guillotines should have a risk assessment detailing work with that guillotine.

Lifting

(Further information is available in Guidance Note HSP/M1 Manual Handling)

- 1 Lifting is one of the major injury hazards, and such accidents can have permanent consequences.
- 2 In all circumstances where lifting is performed repetitively or with heavy materials (i.e. heavy enough to cause injury >5 kg), a Manual Handling Assessment is required to be produced. Further information on manual handling is in HSP/M1 Manual Handling.
- 3 Correct techniques should be used by all workers when required to do lifting. Make arrangements with personnel skilled in moving to shift and/or move furniture and other heavy objects. Staff regularly involved in lifting activities must receive specific manual handling training.

Safe work practices

- 1 Guard the sharp edges of furniture to prevent personal injury.
- 2 Practice good housekeeping. Keep floors free of items that might cause tripping.
- 3 Keep garbage cans out of the way; do not overfill them.
- 4 Prevent slipping accidents by cleaning up spills immediately.
- 5 Report all defects such as loose tiles, broken steps, railings and doors immediately to Estates; contact the liaison line (51000).
- 6 Do not participate in horseplay.
- 7 Keep razor blades, tacks and other sharp objects in closed containers.
- 8 Use the proper tool for the job at hand (e.g. a staple remover to remove staples).
- 9 Jewellery, long hair, and clothing must be kept clear of moving parts of all office machines.
- 10 Do not place furniture, equipment, or materials in locations that will interfere with air movement around thermostats.
- 11 Report any observed pest control problems to Estates; contact the liaison line (51000). Never attempt to apply any pest control chemical yourself.

Trailing leads

- 1 An adequate number of outlet sockets should be provided and the running of cables and/or wires across floors must be avoided. If it is necessary to run a cable or electrical cord across the floor, a cable cover should be used to protect the wiring and to prevent tripping.
- 2 Advice and support on electrical wiring is available from Estates; contact the liaison line (51000).