



Welcome to the safe@work Office and Business Module.

Have you read the General Module, completed the test and printed your safe@work General Award of Attainment?

The Office and Business Module should be done AFTER the General Module.

If it is some time since you have completed the General Module you should read the Review Module. The test for this module contains some questions based on the Review Module.

There are common hazards that exist in the office and business industry. It is important to learn about these hazards and how they can be controlled so that people at work are not exposed to risk.

The Office and Business Module contains information on:

- Healthy Work Environment
- Occupational Overuse Syndrome
- Manual Handling
- Electricity
- Hazardous Substances and Dangerous Goods, and
- Photocopiers.

Within the office and business industry you may be involved in a range of work activities such as dealing with cash records, petty cash, mail, records and banking procedures, writing, typing and photocopying.

It is important that you follow work procedures, not only for your own safety, but also for the safety of others.

Healthy Work Environment

Ventilation

Good ventilation in an office is essential to provide fresh air. The quality of the air in an office building is usually controlled by an air conditioning system. The function of such a system is to draw in fresh air from outside the building and to filter, heat, cool or humidify it and circulate it around. The system also returns a portion of the air to the outside as fresh air is drawn inside.

The use of synthetic materials in the construction and furnishing of buildings, emissions from equipment such as photocopiers and from substances used in an office such as spray adhesives can contribute to work place hazards associated with ventilation.

Cigarette smoke can also contribute to the poor quality of indoor air. *The Tobacco Act 1987, Tobacco Regulations 1987, Tobacco (Amendment) Act 2000 and Tobacco (Further Amendment) Act 2001* ban employers, employees and self employed persons from smoking in enclosed work places. An office is an enclosed work place.



Key Point

You must follow safe work procedures for using substances and equipment in the office to help keep the air fresh in an office building.

Noise

Many offices are "open plan" with large numbers of people talking, telephones ringing and printers and photocopiers operating. The level of noise in an office is not likely to be high enough to cause any damage to your hearing, but it may be an issue if you cannot hear people talking to you, if it annoys or distracts you or if it interferes with your work tasks.

Noise that prevents you understanding an instruction or warning signal may be a risk to safety. This may be noise from outside the building, such as construction work. Talk to your supervisor if excessive noise is a problem.

Key Point

Your employer must attempt to reduce the noise in an office as much as possible.

Acoustic ceilings and wall linings, carpets, barriers and acoustic hoods on printers are ways to lower the noise level in an office. Noisy machines such as photocopiers can be placed in separate rooms or screened to provide a barrier which will reduce noise emission into nearby office areas.

Lighting

Good lighting in the office is essential so you can see clearly and work safely. Different activities require different levels and qualities of light. For example, you will need high quality, moderately bright light for tasks such as detailed drawing or checking documents for errors.

Key Point

You should be able to see clearly without straining your eyes.

Glare can be a problem. Glare occurs when one part of an area is much brighter than another part. For example, if a computer is positioned so that a bright window is behind it, the contrast between dark and light can be so great that the detail on the screen cannot be seen properly.

Tell your supervisor if you cannot see clearly to work or if your computer screen is hard to see because of glare on it. Better light can be provided, or furniture rearranged, to reduce the glare.

Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS)

A person who works in an office would not be exposed to as many hazards as someone who works in a factory. However, unlike a factory worker, an office worker must sit for long periods. Using the correct posture is very important.



When office employees just used typewriters, calculators and pens and pencils to do jobs, it was fairly easy to arrange things on the desk so the worker could sit properly. When computers are involved it is not so easy. You need to look at the computer screen, read documents, use the keyboard and mouse and answer the telephone while sitting at your desk.

Good posture means your desk is the right height, you are comfortable and your spine is well supported by your chair to reduce the risk of muscle strain and fatigue.

Key Point

Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) refers to a number of conditions where there is constant pain in the muscles, tendons and other soft tissues.

OOS (once known as Repetitive Strain Injury, or RSI) can be a serious problem in the office and business industry.

OOS affects parts of the body that are used in work activities which require one or more of the following:

- frequent or repetitive movements (such as operating keyboards for long periods)
- forceful movements (such as using a punch or a stamp), and
- postures held for long periods of time (such as looking at a computer screen that is too high, or holding your head at an angle to see past glare on the screen).

These activities can lead to strain and inflammation, characterised by fatigue, stiffness, swelling or pain, to muscles and soft tissues. Strain injuries often need treatment over a long period of time.

What your employer should do

To reduce the risk of OOS injuries your employer should:

- provide a desk big enough to reach all the things you need without over reaching or twisting
- provide a chair that gives good back support and can be easily adjusted to the correct working height for you (this usually means adjusting your chair so that your elbows are level with the 'home' row of keys on the keyboard)
- provide a footstool, if you feet cannot rest comfortably on the floor when the chair is at the correct height
- provide information and training on how to use and adjust the furniture and equipment correctly
- make sure you are not performing repetitive work for long periods without a break (such as 5 minutes after 30 minutes of work) or provide a mix of repetitive and non-repetitive jobs such as keyboard tasks and delivering mail)
- make sure you are trained to use computer software, as it takes less repetitive keyboard and mouse actions for a skilled user than an unskilled user, and
- make sure you are not overloaded with work or forced to meet unrealistic deadlines.



What you can do

To reduce the risk of OOS injury, you should:

- arrange your work area to make sure all materials, equipment and controls can be easily reached without stretching or twisting
- check your posture before you start work and adjust your furniture so you can maintain a good posture while using the keyboard
- start keyboard work slowly each day to warm up to the task, and cool down by reducing your keystrokes rate at the end of each day
- alternate keyboard work with other work tasks, never put off work breaks, and
- report equipment or furniture that is broken or not working properly without delay to your supervisor.

Talk to your supervisor if you are not sure how to adjust furniture, or if you have any problems in meeting deadlines or trying to handle too many demands at once. Being under pressure and not taking breaks can contribute to OOS injuries.

Some hints for keyboard operators

- keep your shoulders relaxed and wrists straight.
- keep your elbows level with the "home" row of keys and close to the sides of the body.
- give yourself plenty of leg room and keep feet firmly supported
- keep your head upright and balanced
- use a chair with a backrest to support your spine, avoid pressure at the front edge of the seat and don't use a chair with armrests
- move the screen of your computer so it is level with your eyes and you can hold your head straight and comfortably, and
- use the mouse as close to the side of the keyboard as possible (and use a mouse pad).

Manual Handling

In an office, you may be asked to carry or move objects such as boxes, cartons, bins, or furniture. If the object seems too heavy, you should ask someone to help you lift it and use a trolley to move it from one place to another.

Key Point

Your employer must assess and control manual handling tasks that may present risk.

Manual handling tasks include things such as:

- reorganising the work tasks to reduce the manual handling involved
- providing mechanical lifting devices (such as trolleys) where appropriate
- making sure you do not work long hours without a break, and
- making sure the work place layout allows enough space to move and work safely.



You must follow safe working procedures for manual handling, and speak to your supervisor if you are unsure about how to perform a manual handling task safely.

Slips, trips and falls

Make sure you don't leave objects such as boxes, cartons, bins, and furniture in places where people are moving around. You and other office employees could trip, stumble or bump into such objects and be injured.

Objects like boxes and cartons should be stacked and stored safely to reduce the risk of them falling on you or others walking or working near them.

Electricity

There are lots of electrical appliances and machinery used in the office and business industry. Some examples include electric staplers and hole punches, telephones, photocopiers, computers, printers and facsimile machines.

Maintaining and installing electrical equipment, cords and power points properly, and using them correctly and safely, reduces electrical hazards.

Key Point

Your employer must make sure that electrical equipment is in good working order, tested and regularly checked.

Always make sure you use electrical equipment according to its instruction booklet (if available).

Make sure you have switched electrical equipment off at the power point before checking minor problems such as a paper jam in a photocopier or printer.

Make sure power cords from equipment like printers or computers are not dangling or lying on the floor in areas where you walk.

Use a power board with individual switches instead of double adapters.

Report any breakdowns or faulty equipment to your supervisor.

Hazardous Substances and Dangerous Goods

Some substances used in offices may be hazardous and/or dangerous, but under normal conditions of use the risk of injury or harm to health is not high.

Examples of substances used in the office are liquid paper, glue, spray adhesives, inks, toners, solvents, cleaning fluids and agents, and pesticide sprays or slow release fertilisers used for indoor plants.

Hazardous substances and dangerous goods must be used and stored safely.

Your employer must keep an up to-date Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for each substance used at the work place. These could be collected and kept in a ring binder.



Key Point

Your employer should arrange for an assessment to be made of each hazardous substance used in the office, and establish safe systems of work for their use and storage.

There may be simple working procedures in place that ban use of spray adhesives in an enclosed area where the fumes can be concentrated. Or it may be necessary to wear gloves and a dust jacket when replacing some powder toners in photocopiers.

Photocopiers

Photocopiers, laser printers and other office copying machines are now used in most offices but they may have special health risks for some people. Under normal conditions of use, the risk to health is not very high.

Photocopier hazards may include:

- **Ozone emission** - a form of oxygen produced during the photocopying or laser printing process that can irritate eyes, lungs, throats and nasal passages and cause breathing problems.
- **Toner dust** or powdered black carbon that can be spilt during maintenance or refilling the drum and can cause coughing and sneezing.
- **Bright light** that can cause eyestrain. Always keep the lid closed when photocopying to shield your eyes from the intense light produced.
- **Noise** which can cause discomfort and may be a nuisance to nearby employees, and
- **Heat and burns** from hot parts that may happen when trying to clear paper jams.

You should be trained how to use photocopiers correctly, how to unblock paper jams and change toners, and how to follow safe working procedures.

Key Point

Photocopiers should be placed in well-ventilated rooms or work areas to reduce the risk of injury or harm to health.

Self-Assessment Questions

Now try the self-assessment questions. Before starting the questions, be sure to enter your name and the name of the school exactly as you want it to appear on your Award of Attainment. We ask you to provide these details so that you can be issued with the Award of Attainment.

There are 16 questions. If you get 12 or more correct you can print online a safe@work Award of Attainment. The Principal of your school will then sign the Award of Attainment and validate it with the school stamp.