

A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment

Office Environment Series OE 1/2004

Introduction & Housekeeping



Occupational Safety and Health Branch
Labour Department



OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH COUNCIL



FOREWORD OF THE SERIES

Many people believe that occupational health problems only occur in factories and offices are comfortable and generally healthy. This is not so. There are various health risks which, if left unattended, may cause discomfort and injury to staff.

To control the health risks in the office effectively, the employer should:

- conduct health risk assessments to identify hazards and evaluate the extent of workplace risks;
- develop control measures;
- take necessary remedial action against hazards;
- review the effectiveness of the remedial actions.

These steps are not complicated and they can ensure the health of the staff, increase morale and productivity if carried out properly.

The Labour Department has published a series of pamphlets entitled **Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment: Office Environment Series**. They offer practical guidance to help employers assess the risks in their premises and take remedial actions to safeguard the workers.

Each issue in the series is written on a simple activity commonly encountered in the office and associated health risks. Readers can select the appropriate issue relevant to the activity. Each guide contains one or more checklists to assess the health risks related to each activity. After going through the checklists, readers can evaluate the health risks of their work and solve the problems by making reference to the solutions provided in each guide.

Employers may find these guides useful for many common situations. For complicated conditions employers may need to seek further assistance from experts.

This guide is intended to help employers and employees assess the health risks associated with housekeeping in their workplace. Such assessments can be no more than an examination of what, in the course of work, could possibly cause harm to people. By following the guide, you may identify hazards, the degree of risk and the possible solutions.

HOUSEKEEPING

Housekeeping refers to day-to-day cleanliness, tidiness and good order in all parts of the office. Good housekeeping provides a clean and pleasant working environment. It also helps prevent accidents in the workplace and aids the efficient operation of the office. Good housekeeping can usually be achieved by routine cleaning of the premises, proper storage of materials, periodic disposal of rubbish, regular maintenance of facilities and full staff co-operation.



A clean and tidy workplace increases our working efficiency and morale



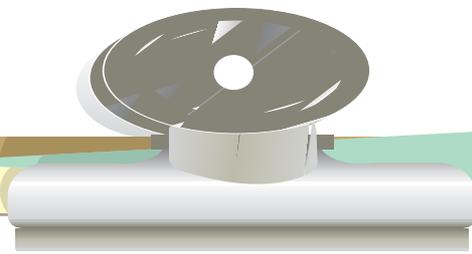
The corridor of the office should always be kept clear of obstructions

RISK ASSESSMENT

The following checklist is designed to help you assess the health risks in your workplace. Answer all the questions and if your answer(s) is the same as that indicating “potential hazards”, there are deficiencies in the safety system or there are situations that can cause health hazards/accidents. You are advised to go through the guidance materials presented in the following sections and apply suitable solutions to eliminate or reduce the health hazards. Should you get matched answers in question 3,5,7,10,12 or 15, the health risks could be imminent and may require immediate remedial actions.

The checklist may not cover all the situations in your workplace. You are free to add more or modify the questions to suit your specific needs.





Answers indicating
potential hazards

General Cleanliness

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Are there daily cleaning activities in your office? | No |
| 2. Are all litter-bins emptied daily? | No |
| 3. Is spillage or litter generally found on the floor? | Yes |
| 4. Is decayed food or plant material left in the office? | Yes |
| 5. Are insects and pests often found in the office? | Yes |
| 6. Is a visible dust layer found on furniture, walls, windows or lighting fixtures? | Yes |
| 7. Is there any mould growing on walls or furniture? | Yes |
| 8. Is the storage room cleaned at least once a year? | No |

Storage

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 9. Is there a designated storage area for documents, machinery and goods? | No |
| 10. Are documents, machinery and goods placed at locations that are easily accessible and without causing obstruction to the staff? | No |
| 11. Are there any documents, machinery or goods placed in a way that are difficult to handle? | Yes |

Space Occupancy

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 12. Is the working area overcrowded? | Yes |
|--------------------------------------|-----|

Maintenance

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 13. Does the company have a schedule to dispose of obsolete or waste materials? | No |
| 14. Is there any defective machinery or furniture that has not been attended to for more than a year? | Yes |
| 15. Are there any people who have clear responsibilities for housekeeping and maintenance of the office? | No |

PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

General Cleanliness

1. Daily cleaning of your office is the most basic way of maintaining a hygienic workplace.



- Set up a programme of routine cleaning.
- Ensure cleaning work is performed as scheduled.



Clean the office regularly

2. Accumulated litter encourages germs to breed. Furthermore, some litter can give off bad smells.



- Empty litter-bins at least once daily, and preferably before the end of the working day.

3. If spillage or litter is generally found on the floor, it may indicate the poor hygiene practice of the staff.



- Clean up all spillage & litter immediately.
- Provide sufficient litter-bins throughout the office.
- Remind staff to observe good housekeeping.

4. Decayed food is a common source of bad smell and attracts pests. Moreover, decayed food and plant material provide breeding grounds for micro-organisms.



- Remove any decayed food or plant material immediately.

5. Insects and pests transmit diseases. Their presence usually indicates some unhygienic conditions in the office.



- Control insects and pests at the source.
- Keep the premises clean and use pesticides when necessary (caution: improper use of pesticides can cause a health risk to the staff).
- Seek assistance from pest control experts if a serious pest problem is identified.

6. Dust in the air can be a nuisance to the staff. In serious cases, it may affect the health. Dust on windows and lighting fixtures can also make the workplace gloomy.



- Try to clean dust more frequently.
- Seek help from the building management to identify the source and find out the solution if dust problem persists.

7. Mould may cause adverse health effects of the building occupants. It grows fast under humid and damp conditions. Common causes of dampness are dripping vents, water seeping from the walls, blocked drainage, etc.



The air supply to the office should be kept clean

- Locate the source of water dripping and fix the problem.
- Identify the cause of seepage and repair it.
- Check whether the air-conditioning can control the humidity effectively.

8. Storage rooms are commonly used to store obsolete items or materials that are rarely used. Although the rooms are usually kept closed, dust and dirt can accumulate on these materials.

- Clean the storage room regularly.

Routine checks and maintenance of the air ventilation system are essential to the general working environment



Storage

9. An office becomes untidy if documents, machinery and goods are not stored in designated locations. Staff have to make extra effort to search the thing they want.

- Assign storage locations for documents, machinery and goods .
- Encourage your staff habitually return used materials to their designated storage locations after each use.

10. If documents, machinery and goods are placed at locations difficult to access, handling of these materials may cause awkward posture and strain of the body. Storage of goods and documents beneath the writing desk can obstruct the knees of the staff and therefore affect their sitting postures.



- Place materials that are frequently used at easily accessible locations.
- Remove materials that cause obstruction to workers.



Using shelves and cabinets, workers can handle files and documents in an easy way

11. Sometimes materials are stored in a way that makes their handling difficult. For example, staff are required to use extra effort to take materials from the bottom of a pile of goods. It is also difficult to handle heavy objects on high shelves. To reduce the risk of manual handling, these conditions should be avoided.



- Use shelves, racks and cabinets to store materials as far as possible.
- Avoid putting heavy object on high shelves.

Space Occupancy

12. An overcrowded working area creates stress on the staff and hampers the operation of the office. A crowded office also requires more ventilation.



- Office layout should take into account the size of the workforce and the amount of materials stored.
- Remove items unnecessary.

Maintenance

13. Obsolete or waste materials occupy precious office space. In addition, there may be unknown hazards lurking within them.



- Regularly check the accumulation of unnecessary materials and dispose of them according to the cleaning schedule.



Periodically check the materials stored in the office. Unnecessary materials should be removed.

14. Good housekeeping is almost impossible without good maintenance of equipment and facilities. For example, it is difficult to keep the floor dry if a pipe in the ceiling continues to drip.



- Report and mend any defective machinery, facilities or furniture as soon as possible.

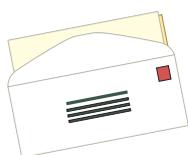
15. It would be difficult to maintain good housekeeping if no one has a clear responsibility for the work.



- The management must appoint an officer responsible for housekeeping and maintenance.
- The officer should also collect feedback or suggestions on housekeeping from the staff to ensure improvements are continuously made.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about the subject or assistance, please contact



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Information on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council can also be obtained through hotline 2739 9000.



Other Titles in the Office Environment Series

- 1. Introduction and Housekeeping*
2. Lighting in Offices
3. Photocopying
4. Ventilation
5. Office Workstation Design
6. Use of Chemicals
7. Manual Handling

THIS GUIDE IS

*The Labour Department's contribution towards safety and health - a shared responsibility
- and the Department's endeavour to serve the community.*