

M8-EN.1.1 INTRODUCTION

If you thought that work in an office environment is completely safe, think again. Every year thousands of office employees get involved in incidents and accidents that result in serious injuries and occupational diseases.

As members of the team of employees, you have the responsibility to participate actively in the effort to reduce the accidents and other hazardous incidents at your work environment.

An indifferent approach and stance on the issues of health and safety at work may lead to unnecessary accidents and breakdowns.

All risks in the office can be eliminated or at least reduced if a number of preventive measures are taken and these measures will be discussed in this chapter.

In order to be effective in our approach, it is necessary to be aware of the approved methodology to be used for identifying and managing risks.

The basic principles for accident prevention as well as the prevention of other undesirable incidents, aim towards the minimisation and reduction of risks.

In order to reduce risk you have to:

- Identify the hazards (sources of risk)
- Assess the level of risk, and
- Remove or minimise risk through the implementation of the necessary measures

In order to achieve this, you have to contact routine checks at the workplace in order to identify the hazards.

The above method is the ‘core’ of the Risk Assessment procedure, which is presented in another part/ chapter of this manual.

Within this chapter, we will investigate some of the most common causes, hazards and activities that result in accidents in the office workplace.

We will also provide the main measures and actions that we must have in mind so that we can contribute towards the prevention of accidents as well as improve the level of safety in our office environment.

Mainly we will be involved with:

- the housekeeping and the most common resulting hazards the slips, trips and falls
- the use of equipment
- the use of electricity
- the hazardous substances
- the storage

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M8-EN.1.2 Housekeeping and slips, trips and falls

The workplace, not only the general workplace area but also the personal work area must be very tidy and clean. Bad housekeeping, other than the negative aesthetic of the office space that contributes towards a negative work culture, is one of the most common causes of accidents in the office environment.

Such accidents are the result of slips, trips and falls.

Slips occur in places where there is spillage of oils or water that has not been cleaned, or employees use inappropriate shoes for the surfaces used in the work place. Liquids that have been spilled on the floors must be cleaned presently.

Trips usually occur due to insufficient maintenance of the floors, obstacles that are left in the passageways or sharp edges that protrude in the passageways.

Passageways must be kept clean from material, equipment, garbage or electricity supply leads.

Falls can occur while standing on a chair a table or a ladder in an effort to reach an object at height.

Example: In an office, the carpet in a passageway is worn for months. No accident has occurred yet. Is this condition safe or there is there a need for action? (M08.01.02)

Use of equipment

The office equipment includes items such as shredders, photocopying machines, fax machines as well as office furniture.

Equipment that is misused or not maintained adequately can be a cause of injuries.

If you are not familiar with the use of particular equipment do not take the risk. It is best if you first go through the appropriate training prior to its use.

Example: In an office, a new shredding machine was brought in the office staff was asked to use this machine because of its improved productivity. Are there any hazards involved and what should have been done?

Electricity

Electricity can cause death, while accidents that did not result in death can cause serious and permanent injuries. Electrical wiring which is in bad condition can be a source of fire, which in turn can cause multiple deaths or injuries.

Electrical equipment that does not function properly must be disconnected and reported to the supervisor for replacement or repair.

Never place cups of liquids on or near computers or other electrical equipment.

Never try to repair electrical equipment. Authorised technicians must do repairs.

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Example: During the wintertime Popi (an employee) feels cold at the office, she brings a portable heater the plug of which is bipolar. She uses the end of her pen in order to plug it in the socket. Does this action by Popi put herself at risk?

Hazardous substances

With the term «Hazardous Substances», we refer to a number of different chemicals and other derivatives that are used in an office environment and can affect both you and your colleagues.

Always read the label on the packaging and follow the suppliers' instructions.

If you come in contact with a hazardous substance clean thoroughly the affected area with plenty of running water and soap.

Please refer the incident to your supervisor and to the local health and safety at work officer.

Storage

The existence of appropriate storage spaces can reduce the risk of accidents in an office work place.

When archiving and storing, place the most commonly used items depending on their size and weight, in easily reachable places between the height of the knee and the shoulder.

Always store heavy items at lower levels so that they are easily reachable. If this is not possible, use a small stepladder to place them at the next available level.

Keep the storage places free of obstacles, old equipment and waste material.
(M08.01.05)

M8-EN.1.3 Summary

Remember that the main sources for accidents in an office environment are connected to:

Bad housekeeping M08.01.06

- The use of ladders and stepladders for storing at height (shelves, cabinets)
- Worn or slippery floors
- Obstacles, (supply leads, boxes, etc.)
- Steps and stairs

Example: In an office corridor, they have left for month's broken chairs and boxes. Is this a safe condition? What accidents can such a situation generate? (M08.01.07)

We should never forget the fact that the human behaviour i.e. a hazardous action contributes or is the main cause of an accident.

Some simple steps to reduce this risk are:

- Never run in the office corridors or in areas used by many other people
- Walk slowly and carefully when you approach corners where visibility is reduced, especially when you carry something
- Make sure that the emergency exits are not blocked from materials and waste
- Place the waste paper and boxes in the appropriate recycling container
- Make sure that the electrical supply sockets are not overloaded
- Never place heaters very close to wall or other surfaces that can cause them to overheat
- Switch off the electrical equipment from the main switch at the end of the day

The work environment itself also plays an important role in accident prevention. Our work place must be equipped with:

- Appropriate lighting
- Adequate ventilation
- Adequate temperature
- Sufficient space to accommodate the employees and the equipment

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It is also important that the noise level is kept low at the workplace.

Example: In an office workplace there are 10 employees while the working space has been originally designed for 7, (space, air conditioning, light, number and size of windows etc). In such a case, an issue will be created concerning adequate ventilation, temperature, noise and may be lighting. Discuss and analyse how the employees will be affected.

As we have already discussed, there is a variety of issues that concern health and safety in the work place. As members of a work team, you have a duty to contribute towards the reduction of risk and the consequential accidents as well as any other undesired incidents that may arise in your work environment.

Taking a number of simple preventive measures can eliminate the probable risks in the office work place.

Therefore, it is vital to provide some time to assess the situation and to find ways to reduce risk.

Health and safety in the work place is necessary not only for your personal success but for the success of the organisation.

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