

Workplace Hazards in Office Environments

This fact sheet is for students undertaking work experience programs, and for their host employers. It can be used as a tool to assist with task planning, and to develop appropriate induction, training and supervision to minimise any risk to students while they are 'at work'.

Students must be given instruction, and must be supervised at all times. Consideration must always be given to hazards when allocating tasks. If any risk exists, students must NOT undertake the activity.

Hazard	Possible Harmful Effects	Possible Employer Action to Prevent Injury / Illness	Preventative Action Students Can Take
Electrical equipment	Electric shock and burn injuries Electrocution Unsafe equipment could develop electrical shorts, creating fire and/or shock hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Test, tag and inspect electrical equipment and appliances regularly ♦ Ensure cords are not frayed/defective and do not pose tripping hazards ♦ Provide training on use of fire protection equipment ♦ Document and rehearse emergency procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Report any faulty item immediately
Incorrectly-designed workstations	Musculoskeletal disorders, including Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) – chronic soft tissue injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Assess workstation layout to minimise soft tissue injuries – redesign may be required ♦ Adjust workstation to fit operator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Adjust your workstation to suit your individual characteristics – seek assistance if necessary
Storage of items (shelves, compactus)	Falls from heights when storing / accessing materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Provide training in safe storage of items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Store material according to your training
Poor lighting Glare	Eye strain and irritation, fatigue, watering eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Re-design poorly-lit workstations ♦ Provide shades and task lamps where practicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Report any concern about your workstation lighting
Hazardous substances and dangerous goods, including cleaning chemicals, printer/photocopy chemicals	Contact with hazardous substances could cause dermatitis, skin and eye irritation Fumes or vapours could cause respiratory problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Provide Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for substances used in the workplace ♦ Ensure First Aid arrangements are in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Read MSDS and follow safe working instructions ♦ Use PPE provided to protect you against hazardous substances
Indoor air pollutants	Respiratory ailments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Locate photocopiers in well ventilated areas and provide appropriate local exhaust ventilation ♦ Provide appropriate air conditioning system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Report any concerns immediately
Manual handling (bending, reaching, stretching, pulling, lifting, repetitive motions, awkward posture)	Musculoskeletal disorders, including sprains and strains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Schedule regular breaks ♦ Use mechanical aids where practicable ♦ Encourage team lifts where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Use mechanical aids provided ♦ Seek help when you think a team lift is required
Noise (including printers, telephones, fax machines, and noise from outside, e.g. construction)	Tension, stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Select the quietest equipment if possible ♦ Replace or isolate loud equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Report any concerns immediately
Poorly maintained heating, ventilation or air conditioning	Thermal discomfort Respiratory ailments Legionnaire's disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Ensure that maintenance/inspection is carried out and documented regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Report any concerns immediately
Sexual harassment, work place bullying	Emotional stress, fear and anxiety, physical illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Establish work place policy ♦ Provide staff briefings or training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Report any concerns immediately