

SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS

FACT SHEET

LENGTH: 21 MINUTES

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2025

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

People who work in offices and buildings may be exposed to a variety of hazards and must develop good safety and health habits to avoid being injured at work. Some common hazards encountered by office workers include ergonomic hazards, slip, trip, and fall hazards, chemical hazards, and electrical hazards. Office workers may also be impacted by various emergencies including fire, severe weather, earthquakes or an active shooter. In this program we'll learn how to avoid these hazards, and others, to ensure we leave our buildings and offices each day in the same condition in which we arrived: safe, healthy and injury free.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

After watching the program, the participant should be able to explain the following:

- How our health and wellbeing contribute to better work;
- How to minimize various hazards such as ergonomic, chemical, electrical and fires;
- The proper way to handle emergencies and evacuations.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- At the start of this program, we're introduced to three office workers: Jackie, Douglass, and Taylor. Later we will see how their experiences affected their attitudes on safety.
- These people, like so many other office workers, didn't fully appreciate the importance of safety until it was too late. People who work in offices and buildings may be exposed to a variety of hazards and must develop good safety and health habits to avoid being injured at work.
- Some common hazards encountered by office workers include ergonomic hazards, slip, trip, and fall hazards, chemical hazards, and electrical hazards.
- Office workers may also be impacted by various emergencies including fire, severe weather, earthquakes or an active shooter. In this program we'll learn how to avoid these hazards, and others, to ensure we leave our buildings and offices each day in the same condition in which we arrived: safe, healthy and injury free.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- When we talk about our safety, understand that we are also talking about our health and wellbeing.
- Reporting to work well rested and able to clearly focus on our daily tasks improves safety, quality and productivity. Eating healthy nutritious meals, exercising, and getting a good night's sleep are critical to our wellbeing.
- In addition, maintaining a neat orderly work area, creating prioritized "to-do-lists", and practicing good time management habits can help reduce workplace stress.
- Of course, we all have stressors related to our lives away from work, but we mustn't bring our off-job stress with us to work each day. Clear your mind of off-job stress by practicing deep breathing, meditation, or walking briskly outside before entering the building to start your workday.
- And of course, if you are running a fever or are sick with a contagious illness like flu, Covid, strep throat, or other ailment, please keep those germs to yourself and stay home.
- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water, as well as periodically disinfecting frequently shared or touched objects and surfaces helps prevent the spread of illness in the office.
- Also, make it a habit to avoid touching your mouth or face with your hands.
- If you need to cough or sneeze, do it into your elbow or into a tissue and then wash your hands.

TRAVELING AROUND THE WORKPLACE

- One thing all of us have in common is the need to travel from one place to another, both inside and outside of our office buildings. And believe it or not, simply moving about the office leads to many injuries each year.
- Many of these injuries are the result of slipping on a wet floor or tripping over an unexpected obstacle. Prevent these types of slips, trips and falls by scanning your planned travel path prior to moving, and continue looking for hazards while traveling.
- Some common fall hazards to watch out for include electrical cords, turned up floor mats or carpet edges, open desk or file drawers, and boxes or other items improperly stored in walkways or on stairs.

- Be especially mindful of wet floors in bathrooms, cafeterias, and near the building's entrance ways, especially when it's raining or snowing outside.
- A good rule of thumb is to assume these types of areas are wet and slippery and proceed cautiously when first entering.
- And of course, never run in the office. Running makes a slip or trip much more likely and leaves little time to avoid an unexpected obstacle or co-worker.
- Of course, staying alert for slip and trip hazards requires keeping your cell phone in your pocket and your eyes focused ahead of you.

Jackie's Story

- "On the day of my incident, my realtor was keeping me updated about a home that was getting ready to come on the market," says Jackie.
- "I started checking my text messages to see if the house had been listed when I tripped over a box of printer paper."
- "That fall really messed up my shoulder and I've spent a lot of time in treatment and rehab. The thing is, I've walked that aisle a million times and there have never been boxes placed there before. I won't make that mistake again," states Jackie.
- Jackie had become complacent and felt comfortable looking at her phone while walking. After all, she had walked that route "a million times" without incident. Don't fall victim to this type of complacency. Always keep safety top of mind.
- Of course, no items should be stored in walkways, on stairs or in other designated travel paths, even temporarily. If you do notice a slip or trip hazard, don't just walk past it. Clean it up or move it if you can do so safely.
- If you can't immediately correct a fall hazard yourself, report it right away. This allows it to be corrected properly and protects your co-workers from a potential fall injury.
- In addition, when traveling up or down stairs keep one hand on the handrail and only attempt one step at a time.
- And finally, when it becomes necessary to reach overhead, always use a proper step stool or ladder. Never attempt to stand on a box or in a chair. That's just asking for trouble.

ERGONOMIC HAZARDS

- Another common type of injury suffered by office workers are those related to ergonomic issues. These include carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, lower back pain, neck and shoulder pain, and various other repetitive strain injuries.
- These ailments are often caused by poor and awkward postures while working, performing repetitive motions over an extended period of time, or repeatedly lifting or bending in an improper manner.

Taylor's Story

- "The doctor told me that the way I was bending over at the waist and twisting while handling packages was a major contributor to my lower back pain," says Taylor as we see examples of the poor lifting being done.
- "Now I know to lower myself down by bending my knees and raise up again using my legs, not bending over at the waist. I also learned to turn my whole body as one unit, by shuffling my feet, instead of twisting my back. It really makes a big difference."
- Like many ergonomic injuries, Taylor's back pain resulted from improper movements over a period of time rather than occurring from a single incident. This is why it is so important for office workers to adjust their workstations to allow their neck, spine and joints to remain in their natural or "neutral" posture.
- A seated worker should have their feet flat on the floor or on a footrest with their knees bent at a 90-degree angle and their thighs roughly parallel to the floor. To achieve this, the height of the chair must be raised or lowered as needed.
- The chair should provide lumbar support and allow the user to maintain good spinal posture while sitting.
- The height of the working surface and/or the arm support of the chair should allow elbows to remain near the body and bent between 90 and 120 degrees. The wrists should remain in their neutral position, in alignment with the forearms.
- To reduce eye strain, the computer monitor should be positioned approximately arm's length away. And the top of the monitor should be at or below eye level. This allows the neck to remain in its neutral posture with the head centered over the shoulders with the eyes gazing slightly downward.
- For standing workers, workstation height is also critical. Adjust the height of the working surface to allow for a neutral elbow, wrist, and spine. Using a footrest while switching feet periodically can help reduce fatigue while standing.

CHEMICAL HAZARDS

- Next, let's discuss a potential hazard that many office workers don't often consider: hazardous chemicals. You may be surprised to learn that most office buildings have a variety of potentially hazardous chemicals lurking around, ranging from weed killer and pesticides to traditional cleaning supplies.
- In addition, many offices are interconnected to warehouses, loading docks and manufacturing operations which may store, transport or utilize hazardous chemicals.
- Before using any chemical, thoroughly read its container label and familiarize yourself with any health hazards or physical hazards it may present as well as any protective equipment that may be needed to safely use or handle the chemical.
- When finished, return all chemical containers to their proper storage location and be sure to thoroughly wash your hands afterwards.

- More detailed health and safety information may be found on a chemical's Safety Data Sheet. A Safety Data Sheet provides detailed information about a chemical's properties, hazards, and safe handling practices.
- Your employer maintains a Safety Data Sheet for every chemical in the building and all employees have a right to review this information upon request.
- If you happen to discover a chemical spill, do not attempt to clean it up as it may be hazardous. Inform nearby workers to leave the immediate area and inform your supervisor or other member of management right away.
- Properly trained spill responders will arrive to assess the situation and contain the spill.
- Depending on the location, size of the spill, and the nature of the material involved, nearby workers may be advised to shelter in place or evacuate to a safe location.

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

- Next let's discuss something that is present in all buildings and office facilities that not only has the potential to cause immense property damage but can also be fatal when contacted directly: electricity.
- To power our equipment and devices, electricity flows through conductors such as copper or aluminum wire, or other metal parts such as the prongs on a cord end or the metal components of electrical devices. Touching any of these conductors while they are energized can result in being electrocuted.
- Normally we are protected from contacting these conductors by the rubber insulation on the cord or by properly installed cover plates on switches and receptacles.
- Inspect electrical cords before use and do not use any electric cord that has damaged insulation or exposed wires.
- In addition, if a cord is designed to have a ground prong, make sure it is in place and in good condition. Proper grounding helps prevent electric shock.
- If you notice any electrical device that is missing a cover or otherwise is in disrepair, report it right away so it may be repaired by a qualified electrical worker.
- Keep in mind that extension cords are only to be used on a temporary basis and must not be used as "permanent wiring".
- Also, do not run extension cords underneath furniture or under rugs or mats. This may damage the insulation over time and makes the cord hard to inspect. And of course, never run cords across doorways or walkways where they will become a tripping hazard.

FIRE PREVENTION

- In addition to being a shock hazard, electricity is a common ignition source for office fires. Don't allow paper or other combustible items to accumulate around electrical cords and equipment.
- Inspect all power cords and electrical equipment periodically and stay alert for any electrical problems or the presence of any burning smells. Report any suspected electrical issues right away and unplug the affected item if it is safe to do so.
- Be aware that connecting multiple power strips together and/or using an excessive number of power cords in the same outlet can overload the circuit and cause excessive heating, leading to a fire.
- In addition, the wiring in most office furniture and cubicles is not intended to power large loads such as space heaters, crock pots, coffee pots and similar appliances. The use of these items should be restricted to the facility's kitchen, break room or other approved area.
- To further reduce the risk of fire, always follow good housekeeping practices. Don't allow excess paper to stack up on desks or counters and ensure that waste and other debris does not fall behind your desk or accumulate on the floor.
- If your work requires the use of chemicals, glues, solvents, or similar materials that may be flammable, only keep on hand the amount of material needed to perform the task and promptly return the container to its proper storage location.

PROPER EVACUATIONS

- And while fire prevention is an important shared responsibility for all office workers, equally important is knowing how to respond to a fire or other emergency.
- All employees should learn the location of the fire alarms in their work area and how to activate them.
- If you discover a fire, immediately activate the fire alarm while also alerting others in the immediate area. This allows an evacuation to begin and alerts the fire department to respond.
- When you hear a fire alarm, you should immediately proceed to the nearest evacuation route that is not affected by the fire.
- Many organizations have designated personnel who provide guidance and instructions during an emergency. If this is the case, be sure to follow their instructions during the evacuation.
- Do not use elevators during an evacuation, because you could become trapped. Always use the stairs to evacuate from upper levels.

Douglass' Story

- "When I heard the fire alarm going off, I figured it was just another drill and ignored it. I didn't come out of my office until I smelled smoke and by then nobody else was around," remembers Douglass.
- "I ran down the hallway toward the exit I normally use but the smoke was so thick I couldn't breathe. Then, I guess I panicked, and didn't know what to do."

- “I ran around and tried a few doors nearby but either they all felt really hot, or when I opened them, I saw nothing but smoke.”
- “I was about to give up and barricade myself in a restroom when I ran into some coworkers. They seemed to know exactly where to go, and they guided me into a utility area that also had an exit to the outside.”
- “I had no idea that exit was even there. I really believe they saved my life,” sighs Douglass.
- As Douglass learned the hard way, all employees should know at least two evacuation routes from their work area. Douglass also learned the importance of participating in emergency response drills.
- When employees drill periodically, they are less likely to panic during a stressful event and are better able to respond appropriately and in a timely manner.
- After safely exiting the building during an evacuation, proceed to the designated assembly area or rally point where roll will be taken to ensure all personnel are accounted for. Do not leave the assembly area or re-enter the building until given the “all clear” command.

SEVERE WEATHER ALARM

- When severe weather, such as a tornado, is imminent employees should seek shelter inside the building.
- When a severe weather alarm is issued, employees should proceed in an orderly manner to a designated storm shelter area and remain there until dismissed. Typically, a stairwell, hallway, or other interior room away from doors or windows will be designated as a shelter area during a severe weather event.

EARTHQUAKE

- Another type of emergency that may impact office workers is an earthquake. An earthquake can occur suddenly and without warning. Initially, the main hazards associated with earthquakes are falling objects and collapsing structures.
- During an earthquake, immediately drop to your hands and knees and seek shelter under a sturdy desk, conference table, or against an inside load-bearing wall.
- Try to protect your head and neck against impacts by covering them with one or both arms. Remain bent over, if possible, to protect vital organs from impacts.
- Hold on and remain in place until the shaking stops. Remain inside the building until instructed to exit by emergency responders.

ACTIVE SHOOTER

- Unfortunately, there is another type of emergency for which all office workers must be prepared: an active shooter.
- An active shooter is an individual who is engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. To survive an active shooting incident, you must be prepared and ready to respond.
- The three options recommended by the FBI and Homeland Security are: run, hide, or fight.
- “RUN” means to quickly evacuate the area in a manner that avoids confronting the shooter. If you decide to run, leave your belongings behind, and quickly evacuate the area in a direction away from the shooter. Continue moving to a safe area regardless of whether others agree to follow.
- “HIDE” means to prevent the shooter from being aware of your presence while also denying them access to your location by locking doors or blocking entry into your hiding place.
- When contact with the shooter is unavoidable and your life is in imminent danger, it may be necessary to “FIGHT” as a last resort. If you decide to fight, make sure to use as much physical aggression as possible. Attempt to incapacitate the shooter using any object or means available.
- Be aware that when law enforcement arrives at the scene of an active shooter incident, their immediate goal is to quickly eliminate the shooter. And you must make sure they don’t mistake you for the shooter.
- Immediately raise your hands and spread your fingers wide to indicate that you are not a threat. Keep your hands visible at all times. Do your best to remain calm and carefully follow any instructions given by law enforcement.

CONCLUSION

- As we have explained in this program, there are many health and safety issues related to office work. But of course, we certainly haven’t covered them all; no program can do that. This is why my final piece of advice for you is to always keep a “safety first” mindset.
- Before taking any action, or making any decision, stop for just a moment to consider if what you are about to do is safe or if there are any hazards that must be controlled.
- Never hesitate to alert management to the presence of hazards or unsafe conditions or to stop work and ask for assistance if you are ever unsure about your safety or the safety of others.
- Always remember, our goal each day is to leave our offices and buildings in the same condition in which we arrived: safe, healthy and injury free.

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ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUIZ

1. a
2. b
3. a
4. a
5. b
6. a
7. a
8. a
9. a
10. b

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REVIEW QUIZ

The following questions are provided to determine how well you understand the information presented in this program.

Name _____ Date _____

1. Reporting to work well rested and able to clearly focus on our daily tasks improves safety, quality and productivity.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Only run in the office when the path looks clear, and you are late for a meeting.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. The height of the working surface and/or the arm support of the chair should allow elbows to remain near the body and bent between 90 and 120 degrees.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Your employer maintains a Safety Data Sheet for every chemical in the building and all employees have a right to review this information upon request.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. If a cord is designed to have a ground prong and it's missing, it can be used safely for only short periods of time.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. To reduce the risk of fire, always follow good housekeeping practices by not allowing excess paper and other debris to stack up on desks or counters.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. All employees should learn the location of the fire alarms in their work area and how to activate them.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. When a severe weather alarm is issued, employees should proceed in an orderly manner to a designated storm shelter area and remain there until dismissed.
 - a. True
 - b. False
9. During an earthquake, immediately drop to your hands and knees and seek shelter under a sturdy desk, conference table, or against an inside load-bearing wall.
 - a. True
 - b. False
10. When law enforcement arrives at the scene of an active shooter incident, wave your arms wildly and tell law enforcement what to do.
 - a. True
 - b. False