

South Bank Corporation Policy

Business Services

SUBJECT: Workplace Health and Safety Office Safety policy
DATE CREATED: January 2008
REVIEW DATE: January 2009

Policy

To provide guidelines to ensure safety within the office environment.

Risk Assessment

Generic risk assessments should be conducted for all standard office tasks, however any out of the ordinary tasks or task which staff perceive to contain high or extreme risk should have a risk assessment completed.

Always conduct a risk assessment before any controls are implemented and a risk assessment after the controls are implemented to ensure the risk has been reduced.

Common Injury and Causes

Poor manual handling techniques, slips, trips and falls are all common causes of sprain / strain type injuries or in extreme circumstances, injuries of a more serious nature. Other office environment illnesses or injuries may include hand injuries, stress, carpal tunnel syndrome, "tennis" elbow, neck and shoulder tension, low back pain and eyestrain.

Employees performing highly repetitive tasks are at the highest risk. The risk of injury increases when workers are:

- Working at a fast pace without breaks;
- Working with the wrists bent away from the handshake position;
- Maintaining one position – muscles that hold a body part in position for long periods are prone to fatigue;
- Putting direct pressure on nerves or tendons at the wrist, eg. by resting the palm side of the wrist on a hard surface;
- Not having the workstation components adjusted properly, or working at non-adjustable workstations;
- Sitting for extended periods. The greatest problems are:
 - Sitting without lumbar support, or with a forward lean;
 - Twisting eg. to reach a keyboard on items which are a long way from the body; and
 - Not changing position.
- Working at a work surface that is:
 - Too high, causing the shoulders to be raised; and
 - Too low, so there may be a tendency to bend forward.
- Not having sufficient breaks from repetitive work; and
- Working under stressful conditions.

Manual Handling

Following are common hazards in office areas. Poor manual handling techniques or practices can result in strain / sprain injuries.

General points to remember when lifting include:

- Bending the knees when lifting;
- Keeping the spine in its natural alignment (maintaining normal curves) and avoid twisting whilst lifting;
- Keeping loads close to the body;
- Using the leg muscles to lift;
- Avoid twisting of the back when moving items, by using the feet to pivot;
- Using a trolley wherever possible to minimise carrying of heavy / awkward items; and
- Considering a two person lift where the load is too heavy for one person.

These principles should also be applied when carrying and lowering objects. Refer to the Manual Handling Procedure.

Hand injuries

Hands are more frequently injured than any other part of the body in the office. General points that may assist with avoiding hand injuries include:

- picking up paper by the corners, not the sides to avoid paper cuts;
- keeping scissors in your drawer, not on top of the desk;
- keeping thumb tacks in a closed container;
- removing staples with a staple remover, not fingers;
- being careful when closing drawers so that fingers do not get caught;
- using a broom and a dust pan to pick up broken glass, not fingers;
- reporting any sharp or protruding edges on your desk or workstation to the supervisor; and
- being careful when using a paper guillotine, ensuring fingers are well away from the blade.

Office Environment

Certain elements in the office environment may cause employees to experience various levels of discomfort or even distress. These may be further complicated by employee's personal or social problems.

Elements in the office environment that may result in discomfort or distress include:

- Disruptive or irritating noise.
- Poor ventilation / lighting.
- Long work hours.
- Fluctuating work levels.
- Organisational change.
- Workplace relationship issues.
- Difficult or abusive customers.

Prevention methods for employees:

- Respond to signs of discomfort / distress.
- Ensure your goals are clearly defined.
- Accommodate change (be flexible and view change as an opportunity for personal and professional development).
- Stay focused on activities that move you closer to your goals.
- Upgrade and maintain your work and life skills.
- Maintain a balance between work and social activities.

Workstation Design

A well-designed workstation considers the layout and design of the work surface, computer, document holder, chair, footrest and lighting. Adjustability and flexibility should be built in so employees of different sizes can work comfortably, or so that different tasks can be done. There should be enough



room under the work surface to allow the employee adequate leg room to stretch the legs.

No less than 2.3 square metres of floor space and adequate work areas and air space should be provided for each worker. This calculation is to be exclusive of any objects or encumbrance and should be considered as the minimum space required for each worker's workstation.

Work Surface Height

The height of the work surface should be:

- Elbow height or just above – for clerical / writing work. The approximate height range should be 70 -76cm so that the elbows can rest on the desk.
- Just below elbow height – for work at a keyboard. The hands placed at home key level should be at elbow height so the keyboard needs to be less. The approximate height range is 64 -69cm. This should allow the shoulders to stay in a relaxed position.

Sloping Work Surface

A sloping work surface can increase visibility of the work and reduce the need to bend the neck or lean forward. This can be helpful for employees with some back and neck complaints and it also reduces reflected glare. About 45 degrees from the desk surface is recommended for continuous reading, and 25 degrees for continuous writing.

Work Surface Layout

In general, place frequently used items within easy reach. The work surface should:

- Be large enough to provide room for easy handling of often-used items;
- Be adaptable to both right and left handers;
- Have frequently used items within a half-arm reach;
- Have other items at a comfortable full arm reach (measured from the palm of the hand, not the fingers); and
- Have infrequently used items located far enough away that the employee has to stand up and take a step to obtain them.

This should avoid employees over-reaching or twisting to get items. In desk-bound work, it gives employees the chance to change body position.

Desktop Computer Set-Up

Consider the following to avoid awkward postures such as a bent or twisted neck or raised shoulders.

Keyboard

- Locate the keyboard so that the forearms are approximately horizontal, with the hands at, or slightly below elbow height.
- The keyboard should be 6-7cm from the edge of the desk surface. Wrist rests should not be used during keying, as they can compress the tissues on the palm side of the wrist causing pressure in the carpal tunnel to rise.

Monitor

- Locate the monitor so the top of the screen is no higher than eye level. Wearers of bifocal glasses should have the screen low enough so that they do not have to hold the head at an uncomfortable angle. It may be necessary to put the monitor on the work surface not on top of the computer.
- The screen should be about 60 -70cm from the eyes or "as far away as possible while still being able to read it clearly".
- It should be possible to tilt and swivel the monitor.

Location of screen and documentation

When locating the screen of the computer in a comfortable and suitable position, consider using a document holder to reduce unnecessary bending of the neck.

- Keeping the screen and document holder:
 - Close together, so the employee can look from one to the other without excessive movement of the head; and
 - At the same distance from the eyes so that the eyes do not have to keep adjusting to distance.
- When one (the screen or the document) is the primary object for viewing, position it in front of the keyboard and the other to the side, as close as possible and at the same level;
- If the screen and document are viewed equally, they should be side by side in the midline.

The mouse

- Place the mouse and pad as close to the side of the keyboard as possible and at the same level as the keyboard.

Laptop or notebook PCs

- It is best if employees do not use laptop or notebook personal computers for a prolonged time:
 - The small size of the keyboard means that the wrists are in an undesirable position with the hands turned in;
 - Small size of the screen does not allow users to adopt a good working posture; and
 - Because the keyboard is attached to the monitor, either the keyboard will be too high which can lead to neck and shoulder pain or the monitor might be too low resulting in a bent neck.
- When working with this equipment in the office use a full size screen and keyboard. If this is not possible:
 - Place computer on a firm surface at the right height for the keyboard;
 - Consider placing the laptop on a computer stand and attaching an additional keyboard with can be placed at the appropriate height and position; and
 - Take frequent breaks if work is prolonged.

Avoiding Visual Problems

- Use lighting that eliminates glare and shadow. Placing the screen at right angles to the windows can help overcome glare problems. If this is not possible, block out windows reflecting on the screen by using blinds or office screens.
- Direct the lights so they do not shine into the worker's eyes when looking at the screen.
- Place workstations parallel to and between rows of overhead lighting.

Chairs

The office should have adjustable chairs, so the chair can be adjusted to suit each individual employee. The following should be considered when selecting a chair:

- Adjustability – seat, back rest, gas lift and controls that are easy to operate from a sitting position;
- Backrest – shaped to support the lower back and adjustable in height and angle;
- Seat – seat depth should accommodate the thighs to about 5 cm from the inside of the knee. Front edge should curve towards the floor;
- Covering – should be breathable and non-slippery fabric;
- Stability – five-point base is recommended;
- Swivel Action – to prevent twisting to reach workstation components, a swivel mechanism is recommended;
- Armrests – padded armrests to avoid pressure on forearms and elbows;



- Footrests – if employees' feet cannot rest flat on the floor; and
- Floor Mat – for easy mobility at the workstation.

Equipment

General points to consider:

- Be careful when using equipment such as shredders, hole drills and paper guillotines;
- When using laminators ensure loose items (eg. clothing or hair) do not get caught;
- Be alert for frayed cords and exposed wires, especially near the plug. Place a "Danger do not operate" tag on the item immediately and notify your Supervisor;
- Use power boards not double adaptors;
- Be careful using the compactus;
- Do not walk between sets of compactus if the situation arises; and
- Ensure all electrical equipment is tested and tagged.

Storage

General points to consider:

- Store heavy objects off the floor and as close as possible to waist height;
- Do not store heavy objects on the top shelves;
- All store areas should be tidy; and
- Do not allow an office landslide by storing files or paper on top of filing cabinets, or on top of cupboards.

Housekeeping

A clean workplace is a safer workplace. General points to consider:

- Maintain a tidy desk, with unwanted files or plans being returned to storage.
- Prevent filing cabinets tipping over by loading the bottom drawers first and only opening one drawer at a time.
- Filing cabinets and plan drawers should not be left open when unattended.
- Plan cupboards should be secured and the feet extended.
- Keep amenities such as lunchrooms clean and tidy.
- Put rubbish, scraps etc; into bins.
- Wipe up all liquid or powder spills.
- Place appropriate signage to warn employees of slippery or wet surfaces.
- Stack and store materials so they will not fall.
- Replace lids and caps on containers and ensure they are on securely.
- Keep passageways, stairs and fire exits clear of obstructions.
- Store chemicals away from food.

Stairs

General points for when ascending and descending stairs:

- Use the hand rail provided;
- Take one step at a time; and
- When carrying materials, try to use the lift if possible and not carry them up the stairs.

Hazardous Substances

The risk of exposure to hazardous substances in the office environment is relatively low. However, it is important to realise however, that if employees



are required to use a substance (eg. cleaning products, photocopier toner), they are aware of and have access to the MSDS, and receive training.

Prevention of Incidents Involving Hazardous Substances

- Wherever possible, substitute non-hazardous substances for hazardous substances. This should be identified through the hazardous substance risk assessment process.
- Before using any substance for the first time read the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). This sheet contains information on health hazards, personal protective equipment, precautions for use, first aid and safe handling etc. The advice given on it should be followed. If a copy is not available, contact the Supervisor or WH&S Coordinator.
- If required provide adequate ventilation when diluting, decanting or using chemicals.
- Reduce airborne spray of hazardous substances (eg. spray onto a cloth rather than directly onto a surface).
- Label all containers (including spray bottles) in accordance with the Hazardous Substance Management Procedure.
- Always use appropriate containers. Never put caustics in spray bottles or use drink bottles to store chemicals.
- Practice good hygiene by washing hands before eating or touching food products.

Electrical Equipment

Electrical equipment is widely used in the office environment. Faulty electrical equipment exposes the worker to the risk of shock, burns, or fatal injury.

Electrical incidents are often caused by:

- Faulty equipment;
- Working with damaged leads;
- Unsafe work practices; or
- A combination of the above.

Prevention of Electrical Incidents

The following precautions should be observed:

- No electrical equipment is to be used unless it has a current electrical safety tag attached to the cord.
- Where possible, use portable safety switches. Safety switches should be tested for operation before each use.
- Check the equipment for damage and defect before use, especially electrical plugs, cords and switches. Do not use faulty electrical equipment. Place a 'Danger Do Not Operate' tag on it immediately and report it to the Supervisor.
- Electrical repairs and alterations should only be undertaken by a licensed electrician.
- Piggyback leads and double adaptors are not to be used in the workplace.
- Personally owned electrical equipment should not be brought into the workplace unless prior approval by management and the equipment has been inspected, tested and tagged by a licensed electrician.
- Electrical leads should not run across wet surfaces, or any place where they can be easily damaged.
- Where appropriate, leads should be run along edges of corridors to minimise the possibility of trips and falls.
- Loop extra lead over appliance handles to avoid straining electrical connections.
- Keep leads away from heat, oil and chemicals to prevent insulation damage.

Breaks

Plan work so there are opportunities for short breaks or changes of activity. Employees should be able to:

- Let their hand / arm muscles recover from repetitive work;
- Relieve a static posture by stretching their necks and backs;
- Stand up to relieve the effects from prolonged sitting; and
- Rest their eyes.

Note: Short frequent breaks are better than longer, less frequent ones.