

MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

"WORKING SAFELY IN THE OFFICE"

Part of the "GENERAL SAFETY SERIES"

Outline of Major Points Covered in the "Office Safety" Course

The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the course on "Office Safety". The outline can be used to survey the course before taking it on a computer, as well as to review the course when a computer is not available.

- **We all know that some occupations are especially hazardous and potentially dangerous, including:**
 - Firefighters.
 - Forklift operators.
 - Construction workers.
- **If they don't know what they're doing, or become complacent, they could have serious accidents.**
- **If you're like most people, the term "employee safety" conjures up images of workers dressed in coveralls, hard hats, and safety glasses.**
 - Because most of us seem to think that serious workplace accidents only occur in factories, or on construction sites.
 - There's just one problem... it's not true.
- **Although white-collar employees have fewer work-related injuries than industrial workers, millions of office accidents occur each year.**
 - A broken bone from a fall in an office hurts as much as one that took place on a factory floor... and can keep you away from work just as long!
- **Fortunately, the vast majority of these accidents are preventable.**
 - In most cases, whether or not you suffer an injury in the office is entirely up to you.
- **In this course, you'll learn about the most common types of office injuries, and what you can do to protect yourself from them.**

- **Office safety actually begins before you get to work. You need to be careful in public areas outside of your building, such as:**
 - Parking lots.
 - Sidewalks.

- **These places are especially hazardous when they are dimly lit.**
 - Darkness can conceal danger... from obstacles that you could trip over to violent criminals.

- **Bad weather can also be a problem.**
 - Rain, snow, hail and sleet make walking surfaces treacherous.
 - The result can be a nasty slip, trip or fall.

- **As you move indoors, you need to carry the "think safety" attitude with you.**
 - Leave rain and snow outside by wiping your feet.
 - Wet shoes can be as slippery as ice skates on a tile or stone floor.

- **Other slick surfaces can be found in the office, too.**
 - Steer clear of spills, and be cautious on recently waxed floors.
 - If you notice a slick area, put a up a warning sign, and call someone who can correct the situation.
 - If the problem is near a doorway, put signs on both sides.
 - A little precaution may save someone days, or even weeks, of pain.

- **Wet or waxed areas aren't the only "floor level" hazards to look for. Watch out for trip hazards too.**
 - For example, an electrical cord stretched across a floor can be an accident waiting to happen if it's not taped down.
 - Extension cords are never a permanent solution... they should be removed as soon as possible.

- **Loose carpeting or floorboards are other trip hazards that should be reported immediately to a supervisor or building maintenance personnel.**
 - Mark the area as "hazardous" until repairs can be completed.
- **But floors are only one place where office hazards may be lurking.**
 - You also need to stay alert as you travel down office hallways and through doors.
 - The primary issues in these areas are obstructions, other people, and your own conduct.
- **Obstructions are a common problem.**
 - You can get hurt by bumping into them.
 - They can also block an evacuation route during an emergency.
 - Keep walkways and doors clear of anything that hinders easy passage.
- **Computer cables that hang where people walk can also cause injuries.**
 - Passers-by can easily get tangled up, hurting themselves and damaging the computer.
 - Use cable ties to control this hazard.
- **Of course, you have to see obstructions before you can remove them, so report faulty or dirty lighting at once.**
- **Crowding on stairways and elevators is hazardous too.**
 - You can trip if you're not careful.
 - Watch out for "attacks" by umbrellas and other objects people are carrying.
 - Avoid these situations when you can.
 - If that's not possible, keep your eyes peeled... and keep your own personal effects close to your body, so you don't injure others.
- **When you're on a stairway, you should use a handrail whenever you can.**
 - Never take more than one step at a time when ascending or descending stairs.

- **Be considerate of the other people you meet.**
 - Never push past them.
 - Approach doorways carefully and open doors slowly.
 - There may be someone on the other side.
- **While an office can be fast-paced, that shouldn't mean running from place to place.**
 - This is dangerous for everyone.
 - You never know what's waiting for you around the corner until it's too late.
- **Avoid horseplay as well.**
 - It's never professional, and it could be dangerous for people who are nearby.
 - So don't do it!
- **Now that we've successfully "navigated" the stairs and hallways, let's see what your work area has in store for you.**
 - Unfortunately, it can have all kinds of painful possibilities too.
 - Do you know where to find them?
- **One of the most commonly misused pieces of office furniture is the chair.**
 - Keep the legs of your chair on the floor at all times.
 - Tipping backwards is unsafe, especially in four-legged chairs, which can tip over easily.
 - Use a five-legged chair to provide better overall stability, if one is available.
- **Remember to inspect your chair periodically.**
 - Look for loose or damaged parts and cracked welds.
- **Don't use a chair that you know is defective.**
 - Tag the chair as "broken."
 - Remove it from service.
- **Never use a chair as a ladder.**
 - That's not what it's designed for, and you can get seriously hurt using it this way.

- **Chairs aren't the only item that are taken for granted when it comes to safety in the office.**
 - Bookcases, file cabinets and shelving can also cause trouble if you don't consider the instability or the weight of the items that you're storing.
- **To ensure that shelves are stable, be sure to load them from the bottom up.**
 - Never put heavy items on the upper levels.
 - This will ensure that the shelf doesn't get top-heavy.
- **Overloading shelving is dangerous, too.**
 - It can cause them to collapse, injuring people and damaging materials.
 - If you think the shelves you're using may have too much on them, move some of the excess material to another unit.
- **File cabinets have their own "safe use" rules.**
 - They should be loaded from the bottom up, as well.
 - When accessing files, always open one drawer at a time (this will prevent the cabinet from leaning forward and possibly toppling over).
- **Don't place loose items on the tops of bookcases or file cabinets, where they can fall off and hit someone.**
- **Once your materials are squared away, don't forget to keep drawers and cabinets closed when not in use.**
 - They can have sharp edges.
 - People could walk into them and get hurt.
- **After you've taken care of your file cabinets and bookcases, you can move on to your desktop and other work spaces.**
- **Clutter in these areas can be perilous.**
 - It can conceal sharp objects... like scissors, push pins or utility knives.
 - You don't want to find these the hard way!
 - Keep pointed tools in a drawer or a separate container, away from other supplies like markers and paperclips.

- **Never reach for sharp objects blindly.**
 - You might find more than you're looking for.

- **While it can take a little "muscle" to use some office tools, applying too much effort can be a big mistake.**
 - For example, forcing a stapler to work is a bad idea.
 - Find out why it's malfunctioning and correct the problem, or borrow another stapler instead.

- **The blade of a paper cutter is sharp and can cut your fingers and hands as well as paper.**
 - Never put so many sheets into a paper cutter that you have to "power" a blade through them.
 - Take some paper out and make two cuts instead.
 - Always keep your fingers at a safe distance from the cutting edge, as well.

- **Speaking of paper, its edges can be sharp, too.**
 - The cuts they leave behind can really smart.
 - To prevent this, use finger guards when you handle large amounts of paper.
 - Moisten stamps and envelopes with a sponge to avoid cuts, and for better sanitation.

- **"Cutting hazards" can also be found in the lunchroom.**

- **If a glass breaks, clean it up right away, with a brush and dustpan.**
 - Never use your hands... not even to pick up the large pieces.
 - Put the glass fragments into a box.
 - Wipe up small splinters and shards with a moist paper towel, then place the towel in the box.
 - Mark the box as containing broken glass.

- **Discard other sharp items, such as razor blades, in appropriately labeled boxes as well.**

- **Some office tools are so commonplace that we forget about their potential to injure us.**
 - Equipment like printers and fax machines can be terrific time-saving devices.
 - But like all tools, they have to be used properly and treated with respect.
- **Electrically-powered equipment requires special attention because of its potential to cause serious injuries.**
 - These machines often have moving parts that can easily grab loose clothing and jewelry.
 - Remove these articles before approaching any powered equipment.
 - Once a machine has hold of you, it won't let go.
- **Make sure power cords are free of cracks.**
 - If they aren't, don't use them under any circumstances.
 - The result can be a serious electrical shock, or even a fire.
- **Never overload an outlet.**
 - Drawing too much power can cause the wires inside the walls to overheat, which can also lead to a fire.
- **If you are repairing a piece of electrical equipment, make sure:**
 - The power is off.
 - The machine is unplugged.
- **Equipment like copiers can have other hazards as well.**
 - Copier lamps can harm your eyes over time, so be sure to keep the document cover down.
 - If you can't keep the cover completely closed, look away from the light and close your eyes.
- **Toner powder is another unique hazard.**
 - Copiers use this during the duplication process.
 - Unfortunately, it can also cause skin and eye irritation.
 - Remember to always wash your face and hands immediately after handling toner.

- **In today's office, the computer is as familiar as the copier.**
 - And, like a copier, in most cases it's harmless.
 - But computers can have their own hazards, too!
 - Controlling light and avoiding eyestrain are the first things to watch out for.

- **Managing light at your computer is a top priority for keeping your eyes healthy and pain-free.**
 - To minimize the effect of uneven lighting, position the monitor at right angles to windows.
 - You can also adjust window treatments if you have them.

- **Glare on a computer monitor is another problem that is caused by lighting.**
 - It can overwork your eyes as they try to filter out the excess light.
 - To decrease glare reduce the general lighting level, move the monitor or tilt the screen.
 - If this still doesn't help, place a "glare filter" over your screen.
 - Choose one that is recommended by eye-care professionals.

- **After you have dealt with glare, you'll want to eliminate other sources of eyestrain.**
 - Your monitor's controls are a good place to start.
 - Look at "contrast" first.
 - A high contrast ratio, such as a light background with dark letters, improves clarity.
 - A poor contrast ratio makes focusing difficult.

- **Your monitor's positioning can affect readability as well.**
 - Place the monitor sixteen to twenty-seven inches from your eyes, and position it so you look down at a five-to-twenty-degree angle.
 - This makes characters on the screen easier to see, and reduces neck movement, which can cause fatigue and pain.

- **Another way to avoid eyestrain is to take occasional breaks to focus on an object at least twenty feet away.**
 - This will relax your eye muscles.
 - You can also give your eyes a rest by simply switching to a different type of activity, like filing, that doesn't involve looking at a computer.
- **Dry eyes can also reduce your ability to focus.**
 - Eyes tend to dry out more easily when you are using a computer, because you blink at about half your normal rate.
 - So make a conscious effort to blink more frequently.
 - If you still have trouble, use lubricating drops or "artificial tears" when you feel your eyes drying out.
- **Now that you've safeguarded your eyesight, let's take a look at your body position.**
 - This is just as important for office workers as anyone else.
- **Long hours of working at a desk can be stressful on the body.**
 - Improper posture can injure your back and joints just as badly as physical labor.
- **To avoid this, you need to maintain "neutral positions" that minimize physical strain.**
 - Keep your seat high enough to place your forearms at right angles to your upper arms.
 - Your legs should be positioned so that the thighs are at right angles to the shins, with your feet resting flat on the floor, or on a footrest.
- **It is especially important to support your lower back, the lumbar region.**
 - This can be done with a lumbar cushion, a pillow or even a rolled-up towel.
 - Make sure your torso is at a ninety-degree angle to your thighs.
- **Remember to keep your wrists flat, too.**
 - Do this by raising or lowering your keyboard, or using a wrist-pad.

- **Your head and neck are important, as well.**
 - Keep your head straight, and avoid side-to-side or up-and-down motions as much as possible.

- **How you organize the materials you work with can also affect your health.**
 - Having them spread out over too large an area is a common problem.
 - Over-stretching can cause chronic injuries like muscle strain and lower back pain.
 - To prevent this, lay out your tools and supplies so that they are no more than fourteen to eighteen inches away.

- **There are potentially hazardous chemicals in many offices.**
 - Before you work with any chemical, read the directions.
 - Failure to follow the precautions on the label can result in serious consequences.
 - To prevent spills, keep the container closed when its not in use.

- **Some chemical fumes can cause illness or tissue damage.**
 - These substances are even more dangerous in poorly ventilated or confined areas.
 - So always use chemicals in areas with good air circulation.

- **Remember that chemicals and smoking are never a good mix.**
 - Many compounds are flammable, and could be ignited by a single ash.

- **The office is full of objects that you may have to move.**
 - Office supplies and other packages can be very heavy.
 - People like deliverymen already know the basic rules for lifting and carrying these loads.
 - You should pay attention to their practices whenever you pick up anything, too!

- **Assess the weight of a package before you attempt to lift it.**
 - Get some help if it's too heavy.
 - If no one is available, use a hand truck or dolly.

- **Get close to the object and lower yourself by bending at the knees... never bend at the waist.**
 - Always keep your back straight when you lift.
 - Imagine a line running from your hip to your shoulder.
 - Keep the line straight, and you'll keep your back in proper alignment.
 - Once you're ready, lift the load with your legs.

- **Lower the load the same way that you lifted it.**
 - Bend at the knees.
 - Keep your back straight.
 - Let the load down slowly.

- **You also need to "carry your own weight" when it comes to office security.**
 - This is a top concern in all workplaces, and it's where vigilance really pays off.

- **Knowing who your coworkers are is crucial to office security.**
 - It makes identifying strangers a lot easier.

- **When you see strangers, offer to assist them in locating the people they want to visit.**
 - It's perfectly reasonable to ask who they are... they shouldn't take offense.
 - Escorting guests to their destinations is not only a good safety practice, it's courteous to visitors as well.
 - Remember, offices depend on outside traffic to conduct business and most visitors are perfectly harmless.
 - But extra awareness is always a good idea.

- **Unfortunately, fire is no "stranger" to office environments.**
 - It's a deadly and destructive menace whose toll is measured in destroyed property and lost lives.
 - Good judgement and sound safety practices are what reduce the risk... along with a sense of what's going on around you.
 - The best way to "fight" fires is to prevent them from happening in the first place.
 - Do your part by keeping combustible materials away from sources of ignition.

- **Remember to smoke only in designated areas.**
 - Dispose of butts and matches properly.

- **You should know at least two evacuation routes in case a fire does occur.**
 - Remember, never use an elevator during a fire.
 - Stairs are the only safe way out.

- **If you do encounter a fire, pull the fire alarm immediately.**
 - Don't try to extinguish the flames unless you have been trained and authorized to do so.
 - If it looks like too much to handle, leave it to the professionals.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **Start your day by avoiding slips, trips and falls... both inside and outside the office.**

- **Store your materials safely. Don't overload filing cabinets or shelves.**

- **Practice good ergonomics. Maintain neutral positions as much as possible.**

- **Use good lifting techniques. Bend at the knees and lift with your legs.**

- **Exercise caution around chemicals and read labels thoroughly.**

- **Be prepared in the event of a fire or other emergency.**
- **Your office won't keep itself safe. It takes vigilant people... like you... to make this happen.**
- **So stay alert. When you do, you'll help yourself, and your coworkers, to stay safe from the hazards that really do lurk in the office!**