University of Bristol

OFFICE SAFETY
Code of Practice

CONTENTS

SAFETY OFFICE **ISSUE DATE: Updated Jan 2009**

1. INTRODUCTION

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require general precautionary measures to be taken within all workplace environments including offices. This Code of Practice interprets these and other Regulations in the context of the University with the primary aim of maintaining the health and well being of all those staff working in offices.

The details of working with display screen equipment are contained in a separate document.

Other University safety policies and guidance notes contain general safety information which is applicable to offices (eg electrical safety, mechanical safety) but for convenience the main safety precautions are listed in the paragraphs below.

2. GENERAL OFFICE SAFETY

2.1 **Housekeeping**. Rubbish and temporary storage of material in offices presents a fire hazard and, if in or near walkways, a tripping hazard as well. These can be avoided by implementing a good housekeeping policy. Combustible refuse pending disposal should be stored in a fire resistant room or container set aside for this purpose away from the immediate workplace. Arrangements should be made for its frequent removal.

2.2 **Fire Safety** Fire routes and exits must be adequately signed and kept clear at all times, especially of combustible materials and sources of ignition. Fire doors should be kept shut as appropriate and never wedged or propped open. Further details are contained in the Fire Policy and associated guidance notes available at; http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/fire/

2.3 **Electric Cables.** Cables trailing across floors and walkways present a tripping hazard. If cables have to run across an office, they should be protected by a rubber guard strip. In addition, in many offices there are too few installed sockets for services to be supplied. In such cases, it is acceptable to supply an extension board provided each outlet feeds only low current equipment up to a total current of 13 amps. Other high-powered equipment (eg heaters, kettles, etc.) should be supplied direct from a wall socket.

2.4 **Storage Arrangements**. Only one drawer of a filing cabinet should be open at any one time so that it cannot topple over. Heavier files should be stored in the lower drawers for stability. Similarly, objects should not be dangerously placed on the top of shelves from where they might fall and suitable ladders or kickstools should be provided where objects are to be manually lifted from or onto high shelves. This type of operation may require a manual handling assessment. Filing cabinet drawers should never be left open when not directly in use or attendance.

2.5 **Office Machinery**. All potentially dangerous machines, eg paper guillotines, should be properly guarded to prevent damage to fingers or hands.

2.6 **Testing of Portable Electrical Equipment**. It is a requirement under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 that all portable electrical equipment (ie any equipment supplied from a mains socket via a plug) should be tested at regular intervals. The tests comprise visual check, insulation and earth bond tests.

2.7 **Lifting**. Injuries associated with lifting, many of which can be permanently debilitating, are prevalent within the office environment. The Manual Handling Operations Regulations make all lifting operations the subject of assessment. Manual means of lifting should only be used when mechanical means are impractical. However, there will still be many instances where manual handling is justified. In such cases, the correct techniques for lifting must be used.

2.8 **Unattended Equipment**. Because of the danger of fire, all heaters and electrical equipment should be switched off except when in use. However, there are cases where it would be justified to leave equipment running unattended (eg when regular switching of equipment on and off decreases reliability).

2.9 **Safety Inspection**. Regular safety inspections of all work areas should be carried out at periodic intervals. An example of an inspection pro forma is available at; https://www.bris.ac.uk/safety/uobonly/forms/#inspect

2.10 Some office materials eg screen cleaners, may contain hazardous chemicals. Small quantities held should be negligible if used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

3. THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

3.1 There are a number of environmental parameters eg noise; lighting, humidity and temperature, which, if at an unsatisfactory level in offices, can cause stress, ill health and poor performance. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 and the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (as amended in 2002) provide guidance on these parameters.

3.2 **Lighting**. Lighting should not be so bright that the contrast between screen characters is diminished or so dark that it is difficult to see to work. A lighting intensity of between 300 and 500 Lux measured horizontally at the work surface height is considered satisfactory for a combination of screen work and non-screen tasks. Room and task lighting eg desk lamps must be suitable and sufficient for the work process. The Health and Safety Office can provide advice regarding the monitoring of light levels if necessary.

3.3 **Noise**. In the office environment levels of noise from other equipment eg printers, faxes etc. can be distracting for members of staff. The noise levels produced should always be considered when any new equipment is purchased. Occupants should be able to hold conversations and use equipment eg telephones in comfort. Any department concerned about levels of noise should contact the Safety Office who can advise and if necessary monitor the noise levels.

3.4 **Temperature**. The temperature of a workplace/room should provide reasonable comfort without the need for special clothing. The temperature should be at least 16°C but ideally between 19°C and 23°C. There is no maximum temperature but if a reasonably comfortable temperature cannot be achieved, local heating or cooling (as appropriate) should be provided. Thermometers or other measuring devices should be available within the departments for members of staff.

3.5 **Air Quality**. Sufficient ventilation eg from windows or air conditioning units, should be provided to ensure that hot, stale or humid air is replaced. The relative humidity should be between 40%-60% and if individuals are suffering from dry, red or itchy eyes then humidity may be too low.

3.6 **Space**. Workrooms should have sufficient free space to allow people to get to and from workstations and to move within the room with ease. There should be at least 11m^3 of free space per person. (NB This should not include any part of the room which is more than 3m high). When calculating the amount of space in a work room consideration should be given to:

a. The maximum number of people working in the room at any one time.

b. The estimated number of visitors in the room at any one time and the frequency of visiting.

c. The space occupied by furniture and fittings.

3.7 **Rest Areas**. In work rooms, eg laboratories/engineering workshops, where staff may be exposed to dust, fumes, noise or hot/cold conditions, separate rest areas must be provided.

3.8 **Miscellaneous Features**. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 specify the level of washing facilities, drinking water, toilets etc. based on the number of people in a building. All drinking water must be potable, either direct from the mains or from regularly cleaned and disinfected storage tanks. Where there is any doubt taps should be clearly marked as suitable for drinking.

Further information regarding the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations is available from the Health and Safety Executive and includes a short guide for managers at; http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg244.pdf