Office Safety

**Purpose**
The Office Safety Program has many of the same elements found in other non-office environments. However, different potentials for personal injury and property damage are present. The office has relatively few hazardous chemicals and no heavy or moving machinery. Like their production counterparts, office employees should know what to do in case of an emergency, be provided with a safe and efficient work station, and have periodic safety training.

**Responsibilities**
Staff Managers (managers with assigned office staff and/or clerical assistants) shall:
- Manage all aspects of the Office Safety Program for their assigned personnel.
- Where applicable, provide safety training

**Hazard Communication Program**
Each office employee must be made aware of all hazardous materials they may contact in their work area. The *Hazard Communication Program* includes:
1. Written Program
2. Material Safety Data Sheets for each hazardous substance used
3. Specific safe handling, use and disposal
4. Employee Training

The University's Hazard Communication Plan can be found at [CMU Written Plans](#). For training information, please contact Environmental Health & Safety.

**Emergency Action Plans**
Emergency Action Plans are designed to control emergency events and minimize the affects. Through careful pre-planning, training and drills, employees can be safeguarded and potential for damage to University assets can be minimized.

Emergency Action Plans include:
1. Exits routes and employee accountability
2. Emergency evacuation and notification to emergency services
3. Personal injury and property damage
4. Severe Weather (Floods, Tornadoes, Snow, etc.)
5. Bomb threats and facility security
6. First Aid Response
7. Chemical Spills
8. Elevator Entrapment
9. Violent Disturbances

The University's Emergency Action Plans can be found at [CMU Emergency Action Plans](#). For training information, please contact Environmental Health & Safety.

**Housekeeping and Material Storage**

A critical aspect of the Office Safety Program, the housekeeping and storage of office materials and supplies are addressed for convenience, efficiency, and to reduce fire and personal injury hazards. Housekeeping Programs cover:

1. Trash removal, recycling
2. Destruction of discarded sensitive University information
3. Office maintenance
4. Office Storage
5. Removal of ice/snow during inclement weather

Material Storage programs are established to maintain office materials for the convenience of the users, purchasing efficiency and fire prevention. The following general procedures are to be followed:

1. Shelf storage should be used for office supplies
2. Paper products and flammable materials should not be stored in HVAC closets or electrical rooms
3. Materials should not be stored within three feet of exits/emergency equipment or within 18 inches of ceilings/sprinkler heads

Heavy items, such as, cartons of office supplies and boxes of paper, should be broken-down to individual reams and stored at waist level. Commonly used items, like pens, paper clips and staples are stored at chest to eye level. Proper step-stools or ladders should be provided to reach items stored overhead or out of reach. Materials should not be stored on a bare floor, within 18 inches of the wall/sprinkler heads or block any isles or exits.

For convenience and safe handling, material should be stored near areas of use. Training should include asking for assistance when lifting bulky/heavy items, using hand carts or dollies when possible. Employees should be trained to lift with their legs keeping a straight back while holding bundles close to their center of gravity. Carrying small loads close to the body and below chest
level will reduce chances of slips and falls. New materials should be properly stored as soon as possible after arrival. This will avoid creating trip hazards and clutter.

Clean, well lighted and maintained storage areas will prevent serious injury and costly property damage. Employee training and periodic inspections will ensure that safe material handling and storage is maintained.

Receiving areas for Office Supplies should be designed to allow placement of goods from shippers on a low counter or table. From this area they may be unpacked and re-distributed in smaller, lighter parcels. This also prevents bending to lift objects off the floor.

**Electrical Safety and Related Work Practices**

Today's office utilizes numerous electronic equipment; i.e., personal computers, printers, etc. A common occurrence is that some offices work areas have only one or two poorly placed outlets. The result is overloaded circuits and use of extension cords. Hazards in this situation would include fire, electric shocks, trips and falls.

Solutions include:
1. Efficient work station design
2. Adding convenient outlets
3. Use of fixed power strips with ground fault circuit and circuit overload interrupters in place of extension cords
4. Replacing worn or broken power cords
5. Never running power cords under carpet or chair pads

Office employees should be trained to never operate or repair electrical equipment unless they have read and understood the directions and to always un-plug the equipment before attempting any adjustments or repairs.

**Environmental Control and Quality**

Environmental Control and Quality programs are designed for employee comfort and removal of indoor air pollutants. When the office environment becomes too cold or too hot and the air is fouled by dusts, odors and stagnation, it places physical and psychological stress on the employee which reduces efficiency. Other problems associated with poor climate and air quality control include illness, increased turnover and employee complaints. Symptoms of poor Environmental Control and Quality are (in no particular order):

1. Stuffiness
2. Dizziness
3. Headaches
4. Hot flashes/chills
5. Upper respiratory irritation
6. Fatigue
7. Itches/rashes

Older buildings will have problems with environmental control and newer, high energy efficient, buildings may suffer air quality problems. Maintaining an environment near 75 degrees Fahrenheit year-round is comfortable for most employees. Employees should be instructed to add or remove outer layers of clothing for their personal comfort. Air quality can be controlled with good ventilation. High energy efficient buildings are designed to keep outside air out, inside air in and do not have much fresh air exchange.

Some sources of indoor air pollution include:
1. Cigarette smoke
2. Carbon monoxide from: furnaces, fueled heaters, parking lots
3. Fibers from fire retardant and insulation
4. Formaldehyde from: carpet adhesives, furniture bindings, construction material
5. Radon gas through bricks and cement
6. Organic chemicals from: copier fluids, paints, inks, paper,
7. Microorganisms from: people, plants, condensed water in air conditioners
8. Pollens, allergens and dusts

The first priority is to gather as much information as possible and then combat the problem.

The best solution to indoor air pollution is increased fresh air. Other solutions include removal of the offending problem or increasing ventilation around them. Monthly, air filters on climate control systems should be replaced and ducts checked and cleaned when necessary.

**Ergonomics**

Also known as human factors engineering, ergonomics is used to fit machines to man. Lately, much concern has been placed on Visual Display Terminals (VDTs) and use of Personal Computers (PCs). Other areas where Ergonomics is concerned is work station design and layout.

Ergonomic design is used to remove some of the stress that is placed on the body. Use of VDTs and PCs stress the body in the eyes, head, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, and back. The root of the problem is that the work causes the body to move in uncommon motions. VDT and PC use strains the eyes when glare from artificial and natural light is reflected off of the screen. High and low color contrasts of print versus background also causes the eyes to work "overtime". Color monitors or amber print over a brown background reduces eye strain and the monitor should be positioned away from windows and direct lighting to remove glare.
The neck, back, shoulders, arms and hands are affected by the position of the work station and office machines relative to the body. The keyboard should be at waist level, the monitor at eye level or lower and the chair adjusted so that the employee's feet rest flat on the ground and back support is maintained. Use of under-desk foot rests are also recommended to allow the employee to shift their posture during a work cycle. Chairs should be so designed that the knees are not below the hip joint. This prevents stress to the lower back and also eliminates excessive pressure on the lower thigh behind the knee which can reduce blood flow to the lower leg. Adjustable VDT/PC desks and monitor stands and training should be provided for employees. To relieve mental and physical fatigue, periodic breaks and rest periods or job rotation could be appropriate.

Other ergonomic designs may be used to remove physical stresses. Bringing the work closer to the employee and reducing the amount of reaching, bending, and routine hand/wrist movements will remove problems with fatigue and musculo-skeletal strains.

**Stress Management**

In addition to environmental and work station stresses, employees may also suffer emotional stresses. The emotional stresses are caused by undefined work goals and ambiguity about what is required on the job. Emotional stress will effect employee performance and efficiency.

Stress Management elements are:

1. Clearly written policies and procedures
2. Thorough initial and follow-up training in work assignments
3. Employee participation in decisions that will effect them
4. Fair and objective written performance appraisal guides
5. Established career paths that define opportunity for advancement
6. Conducting time management workshops
7. Conducting stress management workshops

Opening lines of communication is an important first step to solve emotional stress and provide a healthier work environment.