OFFICE SAFETY PRACTICES

SAFETY TOOL BOX TALK

It is amazing how many people who work in offices take safety for granted. Most people think of a construction site or factory when they think of safety. Well, that's not the way it should be. Granted, construction sites and factories are potentially extremely dangerous; but offices can be too, especially when no one considers safety.

Let's review some of the situations that increase exposure to injury and what we can do about them.

- Avoid walking and reading at the same time. If it is important enough to read, then stop and read it.
- Never leave file cabinets open and unattended; never, not even for a minute. How long does it really take to open a file cabinet?
- Never run in the office. Nothing is so important that you must risk running into a co-worker.
- Leave your shoes on. If your shoes are too uncomfortable to wear all day, then wear different shoes. Running around the office barefoot is a sure way to stub a toe or pick up a staple.
- When you must carry files, don't carry more than you are capable of. If you're grunting or your muscles get tired, you're carrying too much. Use a cart or make more trips.
- Avoid placing extension cords on the floor. These are tripping hazards and can also become fire hazards.
- Never, ever put your fingers in an automatic stapler or stamper. Always unplug it before you try to unjam it.
- Always keep aisle ways clear. Never stack boxes or supplies in aisle ways or in front of egress paths. Never arrange offices with desks in front of exits.
- Avoid bending at the waist when accessing low files. If you must access low files, either stoop down or get on your knees.
- Avoid twisting and reaching for files or other materials in your work station. Move your whole body to prevent back strain.

Follow these tips and the office will be a safer place for everyone.

I hereby acknowledge that I was present at this meeting, that the above items were covered, and that any questions I had were asked. I will adhere to the above to the best of my ability.

EMPLOYEE NAMES

SUPERINTENDENT'S SIGNATURE: _____

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AVOID GETTING SORE AT YOUR COMPUTER

SAFETY TOOL BOX TALK

Many people stay fixed in front of their monitor for hours at a time-which is not a normal, healthy way for the body to operate. Muscles, tendons and joints put up with it for a while, but then give us feedback in the form of stiffness or pain in arms, wrists, shoulders or back. Discomfort may start as fatigue, mild soreness or numbness. It can develop into chronic pain that doesn't go away, for those who fail to heed the early warning signals.

If you suffer such discomfort, it is probably because (1) blood circulation in your muscles is poor while you're working and (2) you are holding stressful body positions for long periods of time. Muscles are made for moving! Body movement circulates important oxygen and nutrients to muscle tissue. Strong muscles can be tensed and held without movement, for example when arm wrestling, but if "static" muscle contraction continues for very long, a substance called lactic acid is produced in muscle tissue, causing pain. This can happen over long periods of time when you ask your muscles to "hold you up" in your chair; "hold your head erect;" and hold your hands "suspended" over the keyboard or the mouse.

A lack of active movement and healthy blood circulation often leads to muscle fatigue. It is particularly harmful if your arm must reach out from your body for long periods of time, to manipulate the mouse. What to do about the problem? Move! Stretch! Take breaks! Stretch again! Keep blood circulating through the chain of muscles in your upper body. Shoulders and upper back seem particularly vulnerable, so shrug, roll, and move them around often.

Put your joints in "neutral!" If the wrist is not maintained in a "neutral" position during prolonged computer use, operators may suffer maladies such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Neutral, in this case, means the wrist must not be bent up or down, to one side or the other, while fingering the keys or using the mouse. In very simple terms, a bent wrist can "pinch" nerves in the wrist over time, causing nerve damage and chronic pain. "Neutral" also applies to other parts of the body, which should be kept in the least stressful working position-with minimal effort needed to hold them there.

What to do about work position problems? Raise, lower or re-position your keyboard, to keep your wrist in a neutral position and your elbows positioned close to your body. Obtain one of the many hand or wrist supports that help achieve the same goal. Locate the mouse in close proximity to the keyboard, so you won't have to reach out, or arrange your work area so your working forearm rests on the surface of the desk. Raise the level of the monitor so your head rests squarely on your shoulders, and your neck and upper back muscles won't strain to hold it erect. Get acquainted with your chair--should it be raised or lowered? Use one of the many available "ergonomic" checklists to help you evaluate your work station.

Work station layouts and individual body types are all uniquely different, so there is no single, magic prescription. But there are a variety of solutions to help avoid muscle fatigue, stress and pain. Every computer operator should learn which of these will work best for them.

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