

GENERAL OFFICE SAFETY

An office may be quieter & neater than a plant or jobsite but it also has machinery, chemical, slip & fall, & fire hazards. Your cost of injuries to office workers can be as high as those of plant or jobsite workers. Your downtime cost & inconvenience while they recuperate can be as high, too. Shown below are some hazards found in most offices, along with ways to eliminate or minimize them shown in italics.

Machines (e.g. copier, shredder, fax, printer)

Permit only trained persons to use machines; remind users to keep body, hair, clothing, & jewelry from moving and/or hot parts; warn users to never operate if protective guards are not in place; plug electric machines only into proper, grounded outlets; replace defective or damaged power cords; replace electrical plugs that are missing ground prongs; allow only qualified persons to service or repair machines; keep combustibles from hot parts

Chemicals (e.g. correction fluid, machine toner):

Ensure users follow label directions & understand the hazards shown in the material safety data sheets (MSDS); substitute safer chemicals if possible

Slip & fall (e.g. power cords in walkways, poor housekeeping, cramped conditions)

Keep power cords out of walkways or cover with thresholds anchored to floor; replace extension cords with permanent outlets; arrange furniture & equipment so aisles are clear & workers will not bump each other as they work; clean spills immediately; use nonslip floor wax; use mats at doors in bad weather; provide adequate light; provide handrails for stairs

Ergonomic hazards (e.g. typist/keyboard operator wrists at awkward position or slouching in chair)

Provide adjustable chairs and/or workstations so workers can adjust heights according to their comfort; require workers to take momentary breaks to stretch, relax muscles, or to look away from computer screen; provide phone operator with headset; assign varying tasks to workers to prevent their making the same movements the entire shift; teach & have workers practice safe lifting; place items to be lifted between knee & knuckle height

Hazards of going from office to plant/jobsite (e.g. noise, flying debris, chemical splash)

Provide safety equipment (e.g. goggles, earplugs) & require their use; inform office workers about areas they are to avoid (e.g. welding area if they lack welding goggles or hoods); warn them not to touch workers to get their attention-a distracted worker may lose control of a tool or machine & injure him/herself as well as the office worker

Fire hazards (e.g. inks, solvents, machinery that becomes hot, smoking)

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Forbid smoking or allow only in designated areas & provide adequate ashtrays; teach users to keep flammable chemicals away from sources of heat or sparks; forbid portable heaters or keep them clear from combustibles & avoid using power cords that are too small; train workers what to do in case of fire or other emergency; do not overload electric circuits