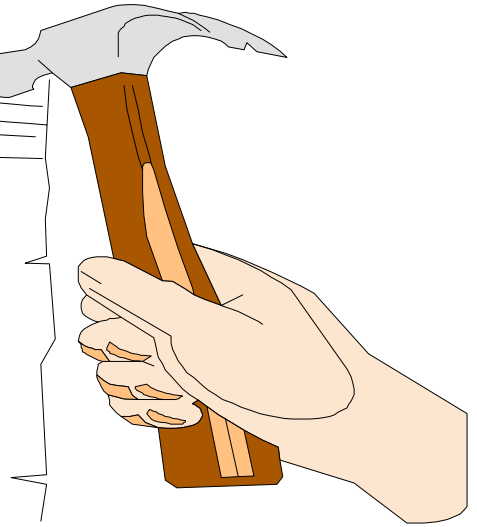


T E A C H T O O L S

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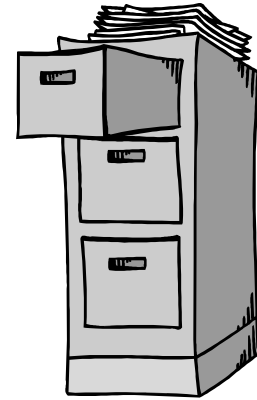
A guide to assist in training employees.

#16 - Office Hazards

provided by:

The Kansas Municipal Insurance Trust

Office Hazards



Meeting Objectives –

To increase awareness of potential office hazards. The result should be increased attention to office hazards and fewer accidents in the office.

Suggested Materials to Have on Hand –

If possible, conduct this meeting in an office setting that you have prepared with “hazards” (e.g., loose rug, open drawers, cords in aisles, etc.).

Introduction/Overview –

When we think about job hazards, we usually picture a field setting. But a surprising number of accidents occur in the office. Even if you don’t work in an office, you probably find yourself in one for various reasons. So it’s worth being aware of the hazard potential in an office. That way you can be alert, avoid accidents, and maybe even help the people who work in our offices improve their safety knowledge and practices.

General Hazards –

The types of hazards you find in an office are surprisingly similar to those you find in a plant. Some of the most common are:

- ☐☐ Falling objects
- ☐☐ Slips, trips, and falls
- ☐☐ Fires
- ☐☐ Electrical shock or fire
- ☐☐ Hazardous chemicals
- ☐☐ Back injuries

Frequent Violations –

KDHR doesn't specifically regulate office safety, but certain KDHR Standards apply to offices as well as field operations.

For instance, every part of cities are covered by the "General Duty Clause" of the Standards. That's the requirement that cities provide a workplace that's "free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm to its employees."

The Hazard Communication Standard also applies to offices that use such hazardous substances as copy machine chemicals. Office workers who might be exposed to such substances have to know about the hazards and protections, including knowing how to read and use the information on container labels and material safety data sheets.

Identifying Hazards –

Because you're used to identifying hazards in your work area, it should be easy for you to identify hazards in an office. Here are some to look for:

- ☐☐ Slippery or uneven floor surfaces or torn carpet or linoleum
- ☐☐ Poorly balanced stacks of cartons or other materials
- ☐☐ Open file or desk drawers
- ☐☐ Top-heavy file cabinets
- ☐☐ Cords, boxes, and other materials in aisles
- ☐☐ Blocked emergency exits
- ☐☐ Excessive use of extension cords
- ☐☐ Overloaded electrical outlets
- ☐☐ Cords with frayed insulation
- ☐☐ Open containers of combustible trash
- ☐☐ Open containers of chemicals
- ☐☐ Stairs with poor lighting or missing handrails

As you can see, there are a lot of possible hazards in an office. The key is to keep your eyes open, just as you would in your own work area.

Protection Against Hazards –

The best protection against office hazards is good housekeeping. Keeping things in their place eliminates many office hazards.

Electrical safety procedures also help protect against office hazards. That means minimizing use of extension cords, not overloading outlets, making sure plugs match their outlets, and replacing cords when their insulation gets frayed.

Using the "right to know" provided by the Hazard Communication Standard is another form of protection.

People have to be aware that substances can be hazardous, and what circumstances make them hazardous. As you know, that information is available on container labels and material safety data sheets, along with information on how to use and store these substances safely.

It's also worth remembering that the "tools" used in an office can cause injuries. You can get nasty cuts, with plenty of bleeding, from knife cutters, razor blades, scissors, and other pointed objects.

Finally, offices, like factories, have to be prepared for emergencies. That means knowing who to contact and what to do in an emergency, the locations of emergency exits, and the evacuation routes to follow. It also means having fire extinguishers and first-aid kits handy, and being sure those fire extinguishers are inspected regularly.

Safety Procedures –

Office hazards can result not just from the conditions we've been discussing but from unsafe acts. If you're in an office for any reason, follow the same common sense safety procedures you follow in the plant. You may also be able to help people who haven't had your training.

For instance, office workers may injure their backs as a result of improperly lifting or moving furniture, equipment, or supplies. As in the plant, it's best to avoid manual lifting whenever possible. Dollies and other material handling equipment should be used to move furniture, large boxes, and other items that are too awkward or heavy for people to lift safely.

When something is lifted, it has to be done properly to avoid back injury. That means letting the legs, not the back do the work. (See Teach Tool #13, "Preventing Back Injuries.")

Other unsafe acts that can cause accidents in the office include:

- ☐☐ Standing on furniture or boxes rather than a ladder or step stool to reach high places;
- ☐☐ Carrying loads you can't see over;
- ☐☐ Smoking in unauthorized areas;
- ☐☐ Failing to fully put out cigarettes and matches in ashtrays;
- ☐☐ Running in aisles, halls, or on stairways; and
- ☐☐ Throwing objects or other horseplay.

Wrap-Up –

As you can see, an office can indeed be hazardous, especially if you don't recognize risky conditions and actions. Good housekeeping, attention to electrical equipment and office chemicals, and taking care with how you move yourself and the materials in an office will help avoid many of those risks and prevent accidents.

Suggested Discussion Questions

- 1 . What are some of the poor housekeeping hazards in an office?
- 2 . What are some of the electrical hazards in an office?
- 3 . How does the Hazard Communication Standard apply to offices?
- 4 . How might people injure their backs in an office?
- 5 . What are some of the unsafe acts that could cause accidents in an office?
- 6 . Are there any other questions?





Office Safety

Dos and Don'ts Checklist

DO:

- Report slippery or uneven floor surfaces, torn carpet or linoleum.
- Keep file and desk drawers closed.
- Stack cartons and supplies carefully so they won't fall.
- Be sure file cabinets aren't top-heavy.
- Replace electrical cords when insulation frays.
- Report poor lighting or missing handrails on stairs.
- Make sure plugs match their outlets.
- Put materials and papers away when not in use.
- Check container labels and material safety data sheets before using office chemicals.
- Be careful with knife cutters, razor blades, scissors, and other pointed objects that could cause injuries.
- Know whom to contact and where to go in an emergency.
- Know where fire extinguishers and first-aid kits are kept.
- Check that fire extinguishers are inspected regularly.
- Use dollies and similar equipment to move large or heavy items.
- Use proper lifting techniques that let the legs, not the back, do the work.
- Use a ladder or step stool, rather than standing on furniture or boxes, to reach high places.
- Carefully put out cigarettes and matches in ashtrays.

DON'T:

- Leave cords, boxes, and other materials in aisles.
- Block emergency exits.
- Use extension cords unless necessary.
- Overload electrical outlets.
- Leave combustible trash in open containers.
- Leave containers of chemicals open.
- Carry loads you can't see over.
- Smoke in unauthorized areas.
- Run in aisles, halls, or on stairways.
- Throw objects or engage in horseplay.

