WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Health and Safety Guidance Note

NFU Mutual
RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

The Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 [Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993] set general requirements in the following four broad areas:

- **The working environment –** including, temperature in indoor workplaces; ventilation; lighting, including emergency lighting; room dimensions and space and the suitability of workstations and seating;
- **Safety –** including, safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles; windows and skylights (safe opening, closing and cleaning); transparent doors (safe material and marking); doors, gates and escalators (safety devices); floors (construction, maintenance, obstructions and slips and trips); falls (including into dangerous substances); and falling objects;
- **Welfare facilities –** including, toilets, washing, eating and changing facilities; clothing storage; drinking water; rest areas and rest facilities for pregnant women and nursing mothers. Specific guidance on welfare facilities is provided in a separate guidance note;
- **Housekeeping –** including, maintenance of the workplace, equipment and facilities; cleanliness; and removal of waste materials.

THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Temperatures in indoor workplaces – Poor working temperatures can result in an inefficient workforce and, at the extremes, cause accidents.

Comfort depends on air temperature, radiant heat, air movement and humidity. Individual personal preference makes it difficult to specify a thermal environment which satisfies everyone.

Workplaces should normally be maintained at a minimum of 16°C, reducing to 13°C if the work involves severe physical effort. It is important to realise that the relative humidity of the workplace will also affect the comfort of the worker and should be maintained in the region of 40-80%. Excessive air movements and draughts will also affect comfort and should be eliminated.

Exceptions to maintaining this minimum temperature exist for work areas:

- Where it is impractical to maintain the temperature;
- Where special processes (such as chilled food production) take place;
- That are open to the outside.

Even where there is an exception, you will still have to maintain the temperature as close as possible to the minimum temperatures. You should provide thermal insulation where necessary, warm clothing, areas where your employees can warm themselves and opportunities for them to use these facilities.

Although no maximum temperature levels have been defined, it is also important to address higher temperature extremes. Risk of heat stress arises, for example, from working in high air temperatures, exposure to high thermal radiation or high levels of humidity, such as those found in foundries, glass works and laundries.

Ventilation – All workplaces must be ventilated by a suitable and sufficient supply of air. The air can either be fresh or purified, but must be in sufficient quantity and be circulated through the workrooms.

Ventilation of the workplace serves several functions, namely:

- To provide sufficient air for breathing;
- To dilute contaminants released into the workplace;
- To remove odours;
- To provide a cooling effect, without causing a draught.

Windows or other openings may provide sufficient ventilation but, where necessary, mechanical ventilation systems should be provided and regularly maintained.

You should maintain a minimum ventilation rate of 5 litres per second per person in the workplace. This is a recommended minimum rate and may have to be increased depending on the following factors:

- The number of people in relation to the size of the room;
- The work activities;
- The amount of physical effort being undertaken;
- Any possible release of contaminants from work processes etc.

If there is any doubt as to the efficiency of your current ventilation system such as, stuffy workplaces, visible contamination of work surfaces, unpleasant odours, high incidence of minor illnesses such as flu-like symptoms, headaches etc, the advice of a ventilation engineer should be sought.

If the workplace contains process or heating equipment or other sources of dust, fumes or vapours, more fresh air will be needed to provide adequate ventilation. Control of these sources can also be achieved through local ventilation, general ventilation or a combination of both.

Lighting – Lighting should be sufficient to allow people to do their work efficiently and to move about safely. To allow these functions to be fulfilled, lighting should preferably be natural light, supplemented by artificial lighting as necessary. In addition to general lighting, local lighting may need to be provided at individual workstations to provide a higher level lighting close to the work area, and also at places of particular risk such as crossing points on traffic routes.

The provision of suitable and sufficient lighting requires careful planning to ensure that the correct:

- Light source is chosen – different types of lights offer varying characteristics such as colour, warmup time etc.;
- Lighting positions are chosen – avoiding shadows, glare and reflection. Appropriate and safe means of access will have to be provided for cleaning and maintenance purposes;
- Lighting levels are provided for the different work areas.

Lighting and light fittings should not create any hazard. Automatic emergency lighting, powered by an independent source, should be provided where sudden loss of light would create a risk and so that those operating certain machinery or controlling certain processes, can safely shut down the process and leave the workplace.

Room dimensions and space – Workrooms should have enough free space, including floor space, room height and unoccupied space. There should be sufficient space and headroom to allow persons to move safely. The volume of the room, when empty, divided by the number of people normally working in it should be at least 11 cubic metres. All or part of a room over 3.0 metres high should be counted as 3.0 metres high. Eleven cubic metres per person is a minimum and may be insufficient depending on the layout, contents and the nature of the work.

These minimum space requirements do not apply to workrooms where people only work for short periods (e.g. lift motor rooms etc.) but safe access should always be provided.

Workstations and seating – Workstations should be suitable for the people using them and for the work. Ergonomic principles should always be applied to the provision of workstations and seating arrangements, not just for reasons of health and safety, but also for reasons of productivity.

If located outdoors, workstations should:

- Be protected from adverse weather;
- Allow for swift evacuation;
- Be arranged to ensure that persons do not slip or fall.

Workstations should be carefully sited to provide sufficient room for the person to gain easy access and egress and for them to stand up as required. Undue stretching or bending should be avoided.

Seats should be provided in the workplace where the work is of a kind that could or must be done sitting. Seats must be:

- Provided for each person;
- Suitable for the person using it (adjustable and of adequate size);
- Suitable for the work activities.

SAFETY

Windows, transparent doors, gates or walls – Windows and transparent doors, gates or walls provide natural light and create a pleasant working environment, but also introduce hazards into the workplace. The main hazards associated with glazing in the workplace are:

- Breakage of glass – If there is a risk of breakage and persons may be at risk of injuring themselves as a result, all windows/ glass panels etc. must be:

– Appropriately marked to make it conspicuous;

– Constructed of appropriate safety material; or

– Protected against breakage (e.g. treat the glazing with a safety film; reorganising traffic routes to avoid high risk areas;

placing screens or barriers to protect contact; placing objects such as plant displays in front to highlight the location of the glazing etc.).

- Falling out of windows – Openable windows, skylights and ventilators should be capable of being opened, closed or adjusted safely and, when open, should not be dangerous:
  - Controls are easily and safely reached;
  - Limiters are provided to prevent windows opening too far;
  - The bottom edge of an opening window is at least 800 mm above floor level (or barriers are provided).
- Windows protruding into thoroughfares – Windows, skylights and ventilators should not protrude into areas where people are likely to pass.
- Falls to window cleaners – this will require a risk assessment and a safe system of work.

Doors and gates – Doors and gates should be suitably constructed and fitted with safety devices if necessary, specifically:

- Doors and gates which swing both ways and conventionally hinged doors on main traffic routes should have a transparent viewing panel;
- Power-operated doors and gates should have safety features to prevent people being struck or trapped and, where necessary, should have a readily identifiable and accessible control switch or device so that they can be stopped quickly in an emergency;
- Upward-opening doors or gates need to be fitted with an effective device to prevent them falling back. Provided that they are properly maintained, counterbalance springs and similar counterbalance or ratchet devices to hold them in the open position are acceptable;
- Sliding doors should be provided with suitable stop devices to prevent the door coming off the end of the track and a retaining rail to support the door in case it leaves the track.

Escalators and moving walkways – escalators and moving walkways should function safely, be equipped with any necessary safety devices, and be fitted with one or more emergency stop controls which are easily identifiable and readily accessible. Escalators and moving walkways should be inspected by a competent person every six months.

Floors – Floors should be free from any defects or obstructions that could cause persons to slip or fall (the most common type of injury sustained in the workplace) or to drop any loads they are carrying.

The following hierarchy of control should be used in the management of slips:

- Prevent contamination of the floor;
- Reduce the effect of contamination (e.g. by providing effective drainage);
- Effectively clean the floor;
- Increase the roughness of the floor;
- Provide a more slip-resistant floor;
- Introduce personal protective equipment.

Access between levels should be by stairs or ramps wherever reasonably practicable. Open sides of staircases should be fenced with an upper rail at 900 mm or higher and a lower mid rail. A handrail should be provided on at least one side of every staircase and on both sides if there is a particular risk. Additional handrails may be required down the centre of wide staircases. Access between floors should not be by ladders or steep stairs.

Falls and falling objects – The consequences of falling from heights or into dangerous substances are so serious that a high standard of protection is required. Secure fencing should be provided to prevent people falling from edges, and objects falling onto people. Where fencing cannot be provided, other measures should be taken to prevent falls. If a person might fall then a safe system of work must be implemented. Specific guidance on working at height is provided in a separate guidance note.

Materials and objects need to be stored and stacked in such a way that they are not likely to fall and cause injury. The use of racking has become universal for the large-scale storage of goods. Storage racking and shelving needs to be of adequate strength and stability for the loads to be placed on it. In general, racking and shelving is made from lightweight materials and is limited to the amount of wear and tear it can withstand. The skill of workplace transport operators has a great bearing on the amount of damage likely to be caused. The greater the damage to racking and shelving, the weaker it will be, until it may eventually collapse, even when supporting less than its normal working load.

To ensure that racking or shelving installations continue to be serviceable:

- Check them regularly to identify damage and necessary action;
- Encourage employees to report any damage, however minor, so that its effect on safety may be assessed; and
- Fix maximum load notices and ensure your employees strictly adhere to them.

MAINTENANCE

The workplace and certain equipment, devices and systems must be maintained in an efficient state and in good working order. This requirement to maintain applies only where there would be an effect on health and safety as opposed to efficiency or productivity etc.

The extent and the frequency of maintenance will vary according to the equipment and the potential risks from failure of that equipment. Where the risk is very low, the maintenance programme may consist of simply rectifying any defects that are discovered, but where the risk is greater, the maintenance will have to be more indepth and proactive.

In addition, there are many statutory requirements for the examination of certain equipment such as lifting equipment, local exhaust ventilation and pressure systems at defined intervals.

CLEANLINESS AND WASTE MATERIALS

The workplace, furnishings, fixtures and fittings must be maintained in a clean condition and a programme of cleaning should be introduced to achieve this. The standard and frequency of cleaning will depend on the work activities taking place, with certain activities such as office work generally requiring a higher standard of cleanliness than manual factory work.

Waste materials should not be allowed to accumulate, should be removed at least daily and not cause a tripping or slipping hazard.

Suitable safe working procedures should be adopted during cleaning activities, especially:

- If electrical equipment is used;
- When using ladders or other access equipment;
- When using high pressure water jets;
- If hazardous substances are used for cleaning.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

- HSE website "Provide the Right Workplace Facilities" www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/workplace-facilities/index.htm
- L24 Workplace health, safety and welfare, approved code of practice and guidance www.hse.gov.uk/pUbns/priced/l24.pdf
- INDG244(rev2) Workplace health, safety and welfare, a short guide for managers www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg244.pdf

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