

Office safety

Offices have hazards, too

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OSHA extends COVID-19 NEP

Agency keeps recording
exemption another year

Information and resources to help your employees work safely

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

No hazards in an office? Think again!

We may think of office environments as being free of hazards, and while the hazards may not be as obvious as they are in a manufacturing or construction setting:

- There can be fire hazards;
- Employees may need first aid or medical attention;
- Improper housekeeping can lead to slip, trip, and fall hazards;
- Materials need to be manually lifted;
- Electrical appliances may become damaged; and
- Employees can be exposed to chemical hazards.

Maintaining a safe, comfortable office environment requires attention to industrial hygiene factors such as temperature, noise, and ventilation; ergonomic factors such as work station design and repetitive motions; and physical hazards such as chemical exposure.

While OSHA doesn't have regulations specific to offices, some regulations apply, such as emergency action plans and medical and first aid. This month's Training Blueprint has an outline you can use to provide employees with information and training on the hazards they may encounter in an office setting and preventive measures they can take. The Employee Handout and Quiz can be used to reinforce learning. ♦



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TRAINING BLUEPRINT — OFFICE SAFETY

Offices have hazards, too

No workplace is ever completely free of hazards and an office is no exception. The hazards may not be as obvious as they are on a shop floor, but people can suffer serious injuries in an office environment.

Overview

OSHA has no single rule specific to office safety, but several regulations do apply. This training outline will highlight some of the common hazards.

Specific training elements

1. Introduce the need to be prepared for emergencies.

Being ready to handle an emergency is perhaps the most important part of an office safety program. When there's a fire, severe weather, or some other emergency, employees can rely on the written emergency action plan (EAP) to give them the instructions they need to stay safe.

Everyone in the office should know:

- How to report fires, injuries, suspicious activity, and other emergencies;
- How to recognize alarms and other warning signals;
- The evacuation route;
- Where to assemble after an evacuation;
- Where to take shelter from a storm; and
- Who to ask for more information.

TRAINER'S NOTE: Provide the details of the emergency action plan for your facility.

2. Review your policies for using fire extinguishers.

Fire extinguishers can be found in the workplace but employees may not be required to use them. Training isn't required if no one is expected to use a fire extinguisher. Just because there are fire extinguishers in the office doesn't mean employees must use them.



However, if you expect employees to use them, either to protect the building or themselves, training is required.

Even trained employees have to take precautions. They should never fight a fire if:

- A fire extinguisher isn't readily accessible;

- They aren't sure if the extinguisher is the right type for the fire;
- They aren't sure how to use the extinguisher;
- The fire is already smoky, hot, or is spreading rapidly; or
- The escape path is threatened or blocked.

3. Emphasize the importance of reporting injuries and getting first aid and medical attention.

Office workers may not have the same risk for serious injuries as do factory workers, but injuries can still occur. Employees should report any injury right away, and understand that no injury is too minor to report.

When there's no nearby hospital, clinic, or infirmary that can be used to treat injured employees, the employer must train persons to render first aid.

In many offices, however, the policy is to send employees to a nearby clinic in case of an emergency or to call for emergency responders (such as paramedics or emergency medical technicians (EMTs)).

4. Describe the hazards of bloodborne pathogens.

There's often blood involved with an injury or sudden illness. Blood can carry infectious microbes such as hepatitis B virus (HBV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). OSHA's bloodborne pathogens standard applies to all "occupational exposures" to blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM). Employees who are designated by the employer to provide first aid (or to clean up equipment and surfaces contaminated with blood) are covered by the standard.

These employees use "universal precautions." This is an approach to infection control where all human blood and certain body fluids are treated as if they were known to be infectious for bloodborne pathogens and vigorously washing hands after potential exposure. Wearing rubber gloves and protective clothing is part of following universal precautions.

5. Discuss slip, trip, and fall hazards.

Slips, trips, and falls are some of the most common causes for serious injuries in the office. To avoid injuries:

- Keep floors dry. Wipe up spills right away and mop up tracked-in rain or slush at doorways.
- Keep areas well lit. Report burned out lights.

- Keep aisles, stairs, and work areas clean and free of clutter. Store materials properly.
- Don't let electrical cords be tripping hazards. Tape them down securely if they must temporarily be run where people walk.
- Report and repair loose or damaged stair treads, handrails, or carpeting promptly.
- Always use a proper stepladder to reach materials on high shelves. Check the condition of the ladder before use.

6. Describe safe lifting procedures.

Office workers aren't immune from having to do manual lifting occasionally. Improper lifting is a common cause of injury. Employees should try to use a cart or dolly to move items when they can, and get help to move heavy materials. When manually lifting materials, employees should follow safe lifting techniques:

- Plan the lift. Have a clear path and a clear place to set the object down.
- Position yourself squarely in front of the object.
- Bend the knees and keep the back straight.
- Get a full, firm grip with the object held close to the body.
- Straighten the knees to lift the object. Keep the back straight.
- Don't twist the back as you carry the object.
- Set down the load by bending the knees to lower it into position.

7. Explain electrical safety concerns.

In an office, properly installed electrical equipment is guarded, or covered and insulated. Misuse and defective equipment can cause shocks and burns. To avoid electrical hazards:

- Don't daisy chain power strips or extension cords.
- Visually inspect portable electrical equipment before use. Look for defects such as loose parts, damaged or missing prongs on the plug, damaged insulation around the cord, and exposed bare wires. Remove damaged equipment from service. Repairs can only be made by qualified electricians.
- Don't handle cords, plugs, or equipment with wet hands.
- Keep cords clean and free from kinks.
- Don't raise or lower equipment by its cord.



- Don't pull on the cord to unplug equipment.
- Don't use staples to secure cords in place. This can damage the cord's outer insulation.
- Don't use circuit breakers, fuses, or safety switches to repeatedly energize equipment; use the equipment's control switches that are designed for regular use. If a circuit breaker trips repeatedly, report that there may be a problem with the circuit.

8. Discuss chemical hazards.

There may be chemical hazards in an office. Cleaning products, inks, adhesives, etc., may be flammable or reactive. Using the chemicals may lead to unhealthy exposures; for example, some chemicals can be respiratory or dermal sensitizers.



OSHA's hazard communication standard has requirements for container labels and safety data sheets (SDSs) that may be applicable. Information on OSHA's pictograms — found on labels and SDSs — can be found in Appendix C to 1910.1200.

In an office, however, employees may only be exposed to chemicals when they use various types of consumer products such as correction fluid or a cleaner for a dry erase board. OSHA's hazard communication standard doesn't apply if employees use a consumer product as it's intended to be used by a consumer.

9. Emphasize the importance of reporting hazards.

Hazards can only be addressed if they're identified. If employees notice a hazardous situation, they should report it right away. Employers should fix issues quickly to reduce the chance of an incident. They also should be especially vigilant when changing equipment, materials, or procedures — changes can introduce hazards. ♦



Key to remember: Office settings have their own hazards and employees should be trained accordingly.



Employee Handout — Office hazards can be serious

If you think your office is free of hazards, think again. You may not encounter the hazards on a daily basis, but you should know what they are and be ready to handle them if they occur.

In an office setting:

- There can be fire hazards;
- Employees may need first aid or medical attention;
- Improper housekeeping can lead to slip, trip, and fall hazards;
- Materials need to be manually lifted;
- Electrical appliances may become damaged; and
- Employees can be exposed to chemical hazards.

Identify hazards

Hazards have to be recognized before something can be done to control them. If you notice a hazardous situation, report it before it can cause an injury. Some things to watch for include:

- Blocked access to fire extinguishers, fire alarms, and exits
- Wet floors
- Tripping hazards (loose carpet or tiles, cords or materials in walkways, etc.)



- Burned out lights
- Damaged stepladders
- Damaged cords and plugs
- Overloaded outlets
- Unlabeled containers of chemical products

Learn safe procedures

Following safety rules is as important in an office as it is in any workplace. The rules are in place for your protection.

Some steps you can take to stay safe include:

- Learn your role in the emergency action plan.
- Know how to report fires and other emergencies.
- Know how to report injuries and how to get first aid and medical attention.
- Follow “universal precautions” if you’re required to give first aid for injuries involving blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) – treat all blood and OPIM as if they could cause an infection.
- Keep walkways clear and dry.
- Use stepladders to reach overhead items.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.
- Inspect electrical equipment for damage.
- Keep file cabinet drawers closed and arrange furniture so that no one will walk into sharp corners.

Office space in a production facility

Office employees who spend time in a facility’s production area should also learn how to stay safe in situations involving hazards such as:

- Excessive noise,
- Air contaminants,
- Flying chips or sparks from machinery, or
- Traffic from forklifts and other material handling equipment. ♦

Quiz — Office hazards can be serious

For each question, show if you think the statement is **True** or **False**.

- | | | |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. Proper storage can help prevent slip, trip, and fall injuries. | True | False |
| 2. Wipe up spilled water right away. | True | False |
| 3. Only designated persons can report fires or other emergencies. | True | False |
| 4. First aid providers don’t need to take any special precautions. | True | False |
| 5. If you notice a loose floor tile, report it right away. | True | False |



NAME: _____

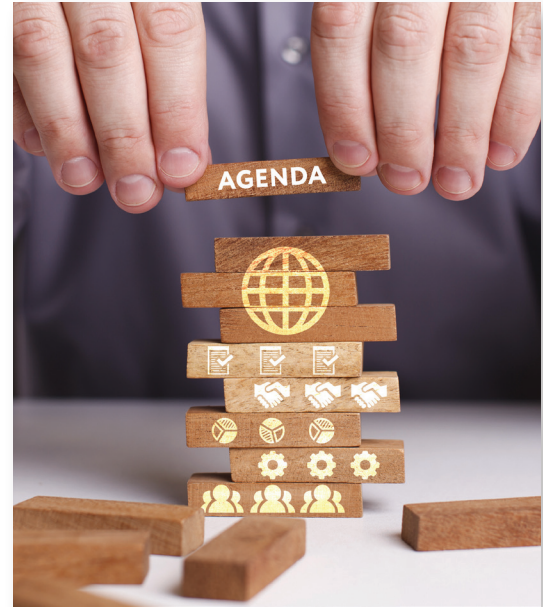
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OSHA issues “Spring” rulemaking agenda

OSHA’s “Spring 2022 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions” was released at the end of June. Three “major” final rules are slated for 2022 on COVID-19, electronic submissions, and hazard communication.

Most rulemakings on the agenda are at the proposed, pre-rule, or long-term stage, but when they come up in the *Federal Register*, stakeholders will have a chance to shape the final rulemaking with their comments.



Final rules

- June 2022 — Procedures for the Handling of Retaliation Complaints under the Criminal Antitrust Anti-Retaliation Act
- July 2022 — Procedures for the Handling of Retaliation Complaints Under the Anti-Money Laundering Act
- September 2022 — Subpart U — Emergency Temporary Standard — COVID-19
- November 2022 — Procedures for Handling of Retaliation Complaints Under the Whistleblower Protection Statutes
- December 2022 — Improve Tracking of Workplace Injuries and Illnesses
- December 2022— Update to the Hazard Communication Standard

Proposals

- June 2022 — Massachusetts State and Local Government Only State Plan — Initial State Plan Approval
- September 2022 — Personal Protective Equipment in Construction
- October 2022 re-open rulemaking record — Walking Working Surfaces
- December 2022 — Shipyard Fall Protection — Scaffolds, Ladders and Other Working Surfaces
- December 2022 — Tree Care Standard
- January 2023— Amendments to the Cranes and Derricks in Construction Standard
- February 2023— Welding in Constructions Confined Spaces
- March 2023— Communication Tower Safety
- March 2023— Lockout/Tagout Update
- May 2023— Infectious Diseases
- May 2023— Emergency Response
- May 2023 — Occupational Exposure to Crystalline Silica: Revisions to Medical Surveillance Provisions for Medical Removal Protection

Note that in July 2022 OSHA intends to analyze comments on its proposed rules on Powered Industrial Trucks Design Standard Update and Arizona State Plan for Occupational Safety and Health.

Pre-rules

- June 2022 — Blood Lead Level for Medical Removal
- July 2022 meeting— Process Safety Management and Prevention of Major Chemical Accidents
- September 2022 small business panel — Prevention of Workplace Violence in Health Care and Social Assistance

Note that in June 2022 OSHA intends to analyze comments on the pre-rules on Mechanical Power Presses Update and Heat Illness Prevention in Outdoor and Indoor Work Settings.

Long-term actions

Lastly, the agency has four items with long-term dates that are to be determined:

- Powered Industrial Trucks Proposal
- Occupational Exposure to Crystalline Silica; Revisions to Table 1 in the Standard for Construction Proposal
- COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing Emergency Temporary Standard Rulemaking
- Occupational Injury and Illness Recording and Reporting Requirements — Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD) Column ♦

OSHA extends COVID-19 NEP

OSHA is extending its Revised National Emphasis Program (NEP) for COVID-19 until further notice; it was set to expire July 7, 2022. The NEP focuses enforcement efforts on companies that put the largest number of workers at serious risk of contracting the coronavirus, and on employers who engage in retaliation against workers who complain about unsafe or unhealthful conditions or exercise other rights under the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act.



OSHA also is temporarily increasing the coronavirus inspection goal from 5 percent of inspections to 10 percent, while it works to finalize a permanent coronavirus health care standard. ♦

Agency keeps recording exemption another year

OSHA extended the exemption for enforcing the recording of COVID-19 vaccine adverse reactions. The agency says it will not enforce the requirement at least through May 2023. This date is found in OSHA's COVID-19 FAQs.

While, technically, adverse reactions from vaccines may be recordable if the employer requires or provides the vaccines, the agency does not want to get in the way of your efforts to promote vaccination. Therefore, employers do not have to record COVID-19 vaccine adverse reactions, even if they provide the vaccine onsite. ♦



Answers to quiz on page 5:

1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True



Next Month's Topic: Tool safety

Hand and portable powered tools are a part of our everyday lives that make getting the job done quick and easy. However, they're such a normal part of our lives that we forget how dangerous they can be. That's why it's important you make employees aware of the hazards that they face when working with or around hand and portable powered tools.

Expert Help: Questions of the Month

Question: Do office workers who aren't exposed to chemicals need hazard communication training?

Answer: Office workers who handle paperwork are not covered by the HazCom standard and therefore do not need training. At 1910.1200(c), the regulations define "employee" to mean "a worker who may be exposed to hazardous chemicals under normal operating conditions or in foreseeable emergencies.

Workers such as office workers or bank tellers who encounter hazardous chemicals only in non-routine, isolated instances are not covered."



Question: What training do temporary office workers need and who conducts the training?

Answer: If the host company is supervising the employees, then in most cases, the host employer is responsible for site-specific training and the staffing agency is responsible for generic safety and health training. In office settings, ergonomics, how to report and injury or illness, and what to do in an emergency such as a fire or tornado are the most likely types of training that would be needed.

If the staffing company is supervising the employees, then the staffing agency would be responsible for safety and health training. ♦

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Policyholders with as
near perfect protection,
as near perfect service
as is humanly possible,
and to do so at the
lowest possible cost.”***

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