

GENERAL HOME OFFICE SAFETY SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES AND CHECKLIST

The following information is provided to assist you in conducting an inspection of your home office. If you suspect that something is hazardous, but are not sure or, if you have any other questions, please contact your departmental safety representative or the County Safety Division (951-955-3520) for assistance.

WORKING OR WALKING SURFACES

Surfaces should be level and free of tripping, bumping, or slipping hazards. Things to look for include: torn carpet; electrical or telephone cords in walkways; waste baskets; file cabinets along an aisle or hallway; misaligned furniture; temporary or permanent storage that narrows or obstructs the work area, etc.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

There are numerous safety considerations involved in the use of electrical powered equipment and appliances. These center around three hazards – shock, burns and fire.

- **Grounding:** Generally most homes/buildings are provided with three wire grounded electrical outlets. In older homes, these must be checked for correct wiring and adequacy of grounds. You should look for cracked or broken outlets, missing covers which expose the wiring or signs of arcing (sparks) or burns around the outlet. Another consideration is excess heat. Feel wall switches and outlets with surfaces; if overly warm disconnect plugs and discontinue use.

Note: The subject of grounding for office type equipment is difficult to cover in this amount of space. As a general rule, if an appliance comes from the manufacturer with a three-prong plug, it should be internally grounded. The ground pin should not be broken off nor should the device be used ungrounded via an adapter or extension cord.

- **Electrical Cords:** Appliance and equipment cords should be checked for proper connection to the device, frayed or damaged insulation, defective plugs, and exposed wires on a regular basis. The use of extension cords as a “permanent” power source is discouraged. If the use of an extension cord is required, a power strip (surge protector) with the appropriate length cord should be implemented.

CAUTION: Power strips cords must never be draped over furniture, equipment, etc., or extended across aisles or walkways, nor extended through doors, walls, ceilings, etc., and never located under carpeting.

- **Electrical Outlets:** A major cause of fire is overloading electrical circuits. This usually occurs through the use of multiple outlet adaptors. Limit the number of devices connected to any outlet and utilize an appropriate power strip (surge protector).

ELECTRICAL SAFETY continued

- **Electrical Equipment:** There is not really too much you can inspect on electrical equipment without some special training and testing equipment. You can, however, determine that it is properly connected with a cord which is in good condition; that the device is not generating excessive heat; and that it is operating as intended.

SMOKE DETECTORS AND FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Fire warning and suppression devices can take many forms, however, in a home office environment, the most common type of devices are smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. All must be maintained in proper working order at all times to ensure safety.

All fire extinguishers should be checked regularly, and inspected at least annually. If the extinguisher has a gauge, check to see that it is “full”. Usually, this means that the gauge’s arrow/needle is pointing straight up. Examine the fire extinguishers hose and nozzle for damage. Also check to see that the handle locking pin, or wire is intact. If the extinguisher has any damage, especially surface damage such as dents, or has been discharged or tampered with, it should be replaced.

Smoke detectors come in two models: hard wired and battery operated. The hard wired model is connected directly to the house electrical system and the battery operated requires the installation and maintenance of batteries. Both models require periodic inspection and testing.

FIRE PREVENTION: HOUSEKEEPING ISSUES

The amount of flammable/combustible material in your work area should always be held to a minimum. Keep fuel sources such as drapes, paper products, flammable liquids, etc. away from ignition sources such as portable heaters, coffee pots, candles, electrical outlets, heat producing lamps, (i.e., halogen) etc.

STORAGE

The storing of any item on top of tall furniture or cabinets within the employee workspace should be prohibited. Persons attempting to place things on top of furniture or cabinets can strain themselves; can fall if chairs are used in place of ladders or even if ladders are used incorrectly. The items themselves can fall, striking and possibly injuring the employee. Properly arranged, such rooms/areas will have secured shelves, adequate aisles, proper lighting, and will be maintained in a state of good housekeeping.

HEATERS

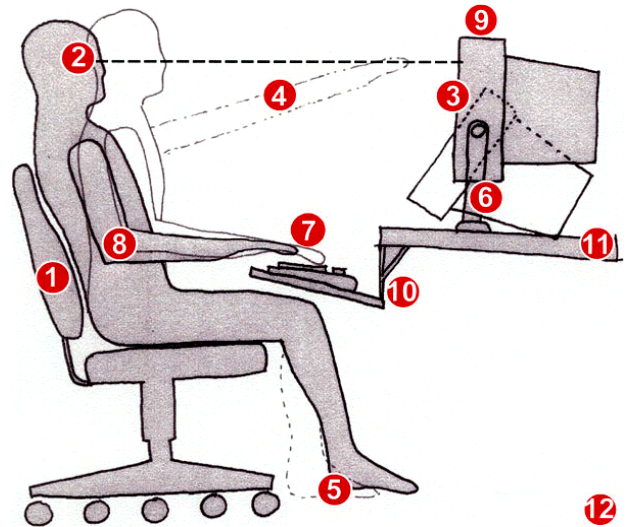
If a portable heater is used be sure that the heating element is guarded against accidental contact, positioned not too close to drapes, furniture, paper, etc. or other combustibles and that a tip-over switch cuts off electrical power.

RADIATORS

Some older homes/buildings use radiators for heat instead of forced air systems. If your work area has radiators, be sure not to place combustibles or flammable articles on or near them. Also check to assure that electrical power cords are not allowed to “drape” across them.

GENERAL ERGONOMIC GUIDELINES

1. Adjust the chair back rest slightly backward, but with firm tension against the back.
2. Position top of monitor 2-3" above eyes.
3. Adjust screen to reduce glare perpendicular to the ceiling.
4. Sit an arms length away from computer screen.
5. Keep feet on the floor or use a footrest.
6. Use a document holder to place documents on.
7. Keep wrists flat and straight when typing.
8. Keep arms and elbows close to body.
9. Center monitor and keyboard in front of you.
10. Adjust keyboard tray to a negative tilt if possible.
11. Use a stable work surface.



- **LIGHTING:** Simple lighting adjustments can help you minimize glare and reduce eyestrain and headaches. Glare can come from a light source, such as a lighting fixture or the sun, or from a bright surface, such as a mirror, light-colored clothing.
 1. Lower the total (ambient) light levels whenever possible to reduce glare on your computer screen, i.e., remove or turn off some over head lighting.
 2. Avoid placing your monitor directly under cabinet task lights.
 3. Position your screen at a right angle to the window producing the glare. Also avoid lighting coming over your shoulder directly above or behind you.
 4. Close your shades, curtains, or blinds as outside light levels change during the day.
 5. Tilt your computer screen slightly down so that light does not reflect back into your eyes.
 6. Position your equipment to have ceiling lights off to the side.
 7. Position your task lights directly on your documents.
 8. Adjust your monitor display contrast and brightness to improve viewing comfort

GENERAL ERGONOMIC GUIDELINES continue

- **LAPTOPS:** Laptops have become a very useful tool for teleworkers and field workers. They are used in hotels rooms, on airplanes, in cars (*not while driving!*), other work locations, and at home. Laptops can also be used as the primary computer for home use. Here are some tips to prevent muscle and eye stress while using laptops:
 1. Use a docking station if the laptop is used as the main computer. The laptop becomes the computer processing unit (CPU) and allows you to work with a full size monitor, keyboard mouse, trackball, touch pad, or other pointing device.
 2. Eliminate glare where possible, use shades, turn off extra lights, or change positions.
 3. Use proper lifting techniques when moving the laptop and other equipment, especially in and out of vehicles. “**NO** twist, lift and turn.”

- **WORK HABITS:** Even the best posture and most ergonomically correct workstation won’t prevent muscular stress and fatigue if you sit for several hours in one position. Breaks from computer work can help keep eyes, mind and body refreshed and energized.
 1. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (*NIOSH*) recommends taking a short break every couple of hours of uninterrupted computer work (*Check with your supervisor for your break schedule.*)
 2. Experts also suggest brief, frequent “microbreaks.” They don’t have to involve leaving your workstation. Suggestions include moving around, stretching, doing non-computer tasks, and refocusing your eyes.

The timing of such microbreaks is more important than the length. To be the most effective, a break should be taken *before* the onset of fatigue rather than recuperating from it.

EMPLOYEE SELF-CERTIFICATION SAFETY EVALUATION

Name: _____ Department/Program: _____

Address: _____ City/State: _____

Business Telephone: _____

Supervisor: _____

Dear Telecommuter Program Participant:

The following checklist is designed to assess the overall safety of the alternate duty workstation. Each participant should read and complete the Self-Certification Safety Evaluation. Upon completion the checklist should be signed and dated by the participant employee and immediate supervisor and forwarded to the County Safety Division for review and approval. In addition, **the employee is required to include a recent electronic photo of the proposed workstation** when forwarding this document to the County Safety Division.

The alternate work site is located at: _____

Describe the designated work area in the alternate work site (i.e., home office, den, garage, etc.): _____

A. WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT	YES	NO
1. Are all stairs with 4 or more steps equipped with handrails?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is all electrical equipment free of recognized hazards that would cause harm i.e. frayed wires, bare conductors, loose wires, flexible wires running through walls, exposed wires to the ceiling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Are aisles, doorways, and corners free of obstructions to permit visibility and movement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Are file cabinets and storage closets arranged so drawers and doors do not open into walkways?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Do chairs have any loose casters (wheels) and are the rungs and legs of the chair sturdy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Are phone lines, electrical cords, and power strip cables secured under a desk or along side a baseboard?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Is the office space neat, clean, and free of excessive amounts of combustibles?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Are floor surfaces clean, dry, level and free of worn or frayed seams?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is there adequate light for reading?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B. COMPUTER WORKSTATION	YES	NO
10. Is your chair adjustable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Do you know how to adjust your chair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Is your back adequately supported by a backrest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Are your feet on the floor or fully supported by a footrest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Is your computer monitor aligned with your keyboard and positioned at the correct height (top of screen at eye level)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Do you have a document holder?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Do you have enough leg room at your workstation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Is the monitor free from noticeable glare?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. When keying, are your forearms close to parallel with the floor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Are your wrists fairly straight when keying?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Employee Signature

Date

Immediate Supervisor's Signature

Date

Safety Division: Approval Disapproval

Name of Approving Staff: _____

Comments:

Note: Supervisor should forward a copy of this checklist to the County Safety Division and retain a copy of this SAFETY SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES AND CHECKLIST along with the written Telecommute agreement. This safety checklist is intended to be a guide for the employee and the supervisor. If either the employee or the supervisor has concerns as to whether the prospective alternative work site is appropriate or adequate in terms of safety and health, either should consult with the department safety representative or the County Safety Division (951-955-3520).

Employee should be generally familiar with the following safety programs:

- Injury and Illness Prevention Program – County Safety Document Number 100
- Ergonomics – Count Safety Document Number 2005
- General Safety Rules – County Safety Document Number 1000 (as applicable)