

**SUBJECT:** Office Safety

**DATE:** January 2000

## **Introduction:**

Every work environment has potential safety and health hazards, and the office is no exception. A large percentage of Montana Tech's employees spend at least some time in an office setting. Following a few common sense rules and making certain the workspace is set up properly can minimize the risk of injury to office workers.

## **Lighting:**

Insufficient lighting can cause trips and falls as well as eyestrain and headaches. Tasks that require a great deal of detailed work require more lighting than tasks that do not require as much detail. Workers who routinely work on detailed projects should have the light levels in their work area evaluated. Light levels should also be evaluated if headaches and eyestrain are problems. If insufficient lighting is evident, supplemental lighting (lamps) should be used in that area. Supplemental lighting is a good and inexpensive way to increase the illumination of a small work area.

## **Noise:**

Noise is defined as unwanted sound. Noise can be distracting and annoying, can reduce productivity and interfere with communication. To reduce noise in the office:

- When purchasing new equipment, include noise level in your decision-making process.
- Place noisy equipment away from work areas if possible.
- Properly maintain equipment to keep it from becoming excessively loud.
- Isolate equipment with barriers, such as area partitions.
- Place equipment on rubber mats to reduce noise from vibration.
- Try to schedule noisy tasks for times when they will have a less detrimental effect.

## **Housekeeping:**

Poor housekeeping practices can cause a variety of hazards, which can lead to injuries, fires, and unhealthful working conditions. The following suggestions will help keep work areas in proper order:

- Keep aisles free from obstructions. Do not leave boxes, chairs, or equipment in walkways.
- Replace or repair damaged office furniture or equipment.
- Store materials neatly in the proper area. Materials should never be stacked high enough to cause injury to someone if they fell. Materials should never be stacked

within 18 inches of sprinkler heads or 24 inches of a ceiling if sprinkler heads are not present.

- File cabinet and desk drawers should be kept closed when not in use.
- Close a drawer to a filing cabinet as soon as you are through with it and before opening another. Use the handle for opening and closing drawers. Do not open more than one of the top drawers at the same time.
- File heavier items in bottom drawers so cabinet isn't top-heavy.
- Clean all spills immediately.

## Falls:

Many office accidents result in falls from slips and trips and falls from heights. To reduce the risk of falls:

- A ladder or step stool should be used to retrieve anything above shoulder height.
- Ladders or step stools should be sturdy and in good condition. Inspect ladders or step stools prior to every use.
- Do not substitute office furniture or boxes for ladders or step stools.
- Keep floor coverings laying flat. Immediately straighten folded or wrinkled floor coverings. Report loose tiles, broken steps, or damaged railings immediately.

Many falls in the office can be attributed to improper use of office chairs.

- Do not roll for long distances on office chairs. If you need to move beyond your desk area, get out of the chair and walk.
- Be aware of the location of your chair before sitting down. Many falls happen when people are preoccupied while trying to sit down.
- Do not lean back on any chair. Keep all of the legs of the chair planted firmly on the floor at all times.

## Electrical:

Most office equipment is powered by electricity, which can pose a safety hazard to office workers. The proper use and maintenance of electrical equipment can minimize this hazard.

- Frayed, broken, or cracked electrical cords should be replaced immediately. Discontinue use of the equipment until the repairs have been made.
- Do not place liquids near electrical equipment or operate electrical equipment with wet hands.
- Do not overload electrical outlets.
- Extension cords cannot be used for permanent wiring, only for temporary use.
- Power cords should be attached directly to the wall or floor outlet when possible. Use fused multi-outlet strips which are "UL listed" for office equipment rather than extension cords. Do not stretch them across walkways.
- Supplemental heaters or space heaters must be the permanently sealed oil-filled heaters. Other space heaters are fire hazards and are not allowed. Unplug any supplemental heaters when you leave the office.

- Do not attempt to repair electrical equipment yourself; call maintenance.

## General:

- Keep sharp object such as razor blades and tacks in closed containers.
- Use the proper tool for the job.
- Do not participate in horseplay.
- Keep jewelry and long hair away from moving parts of machinery.
- Wear shoes that provide comfort, support and proper balance.
- Keep fingers away from the staple release mechanism when closing the stapler after filling.
- Keep fingers away from the cutting edge of paper cutters. Lock the paper cutter handle in the closed position when cutter is not in use.
- Obtain prompt first aid for paper cuts or other wounds which penetrate the skin. Wash thoroughly with soap and water.

## Fire:

Montana Tech's Emergency Action and Contingency Plan outlines the proper emergency response in the event of a fire. Evacuate the building by pulling a fire alarm, and call 911 from a safe location. Each office should discuss emergency situations and how they will evacuate.

- Doors must be kept unobstructed at all times to permit egress.
- Close office doors behind you to prevent or slow the spread of the fire.
- Do not hang items on or around fire extinguishers.
- Familiarize yourself with the locations of the fire alarms in your building.
- Familiarize yourself with the locations and classifications of the fire extinguishers in your area.
- Know the escape routes for your building.
- Observe Montana Tech's smoking policy. All buildings on this campus are smoke free.
- Be aware that there are many flammable materials in the office, such as glue, nail polish, and even white-out. Do not use these or other flammable materials near a heat source.