

# Office Employees: Why Should I Care About Safety?

True or False: Employees in an office environment have no reason to have workplace safety concerns.  
Answer: False. Office environments can have hazards and they are frequently overlooked and receive minimal attention due to their low risk. Office injuries and illnesses do happen and increased awareness helps to minimize the occurrence of workplace incidents. Use the information in this one pager to learn more about office hazards so you can modify training and education resources for office employees.

## ERGONOMICS

Ergonomic hazards are the most common risks in an office environment. Ergonomic hazards often go unnoticed until an employee experiences aches and pains. Licensed healthcare providers diagnose official ergonomic-related illnesses as a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD).

Preventing MSDs requires engagement and commitment from leaders, supervisors, safety and occupational health (SOH) staff, and employees. A robust ergonomics program, resource availability, and an early incident reporting process are all integral to MSD prevention. Promote MSD prevention through workstation design, employee wellness, and training and communication.

## CHEMICALS

Chemical hazards are present in the office and may arise from printer ink, dry erase board cleaners, office cleaning supplies, window cleaners, disinfectants, and deodorizers. While these products are generally considered safe because we use them at home, they may still trigger asthma, nose and throat irritation, dermatitis, or other health problems. Sensitivity and susceptibility to chemicals vary per person.



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Train employees on the hazardous chemicals which can be found in an office environment. Employ a process to review and approve any chemical brought into the workplace, including general office cleaners and those used by janitorial staff. Maintain Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) for each hazardous chemical and inform employees how to access these documents. Require janitorial services to lock supply closets after use, and limit access to cleaning chemicals. Inform employees to immediately report potential allergic reactions or adverse actions to chemicals.

### What is an MSD?

An injury affecting the muscles, ligaments, tendons, nerves, and/or spinal discs in the body.

### What causes an MSD?

Sudden or sustained exposure to repetitive motion, force, vibration, and awkward positions, including poor workstation design.

### Are there common MSDs?




Common MSDs include: carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, herniated/bulging disc, strains, or sprains.



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## SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

A common cause of office injuries are slips, trips, and falls. Slip, trip, and fall prevention requires an office environment inspection process. Look at flooring surfaces for damage and rolled up carpets and mats. Look at aisle obstructions (e.g., boxes, furniture, cords) and clearances. Check stairways for damaged stairs and handrails. Implement a ladder inspection program to identify defects and needed maintenance. Clean up spills immediately and keep “Wet Floor” signs and orange cones on hand to place around wet surfaces. On rainy days, mop up water frequently and consider providing bags for wet umbrellas.

SLIPS	TRIPS	FALLS
<p>There is insufficient friction between the bottom of shoes and the floor surface</p>  <p>May result from liquids or debris on the floor, frayed carpet, loose floor tiles, stairs with insufficient treads</p>	<p>The foot hits something and the person loses balance</p>  <p>May result from electrical cords, rugs, mats, filing cabinet drawers, uneven walking surfaces, office supplies left out</p>	<p>A drop from one level to either a lower level (fall from elevation) or on the same level</p>  <p>May result from use of a stepladder, climbing on shelving to access materials, using a chair to reach items, not using stair handrails</p>

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## ELECTRICAL AND FIRE

Electrical hazards may result in electric shock, electrocution, fires, and explosions – even in an office environment. Consider developing electrical safety programs, policies, and procedures to reduce risks. Define the types of appliances acceptable in workspaces and identify which belong in designated lunchrooms only. Consider the process for granting authority to use space heaters, heating pads, and other warming devices.

Utilize an office environment inspection process to look at electrical components around the office (e.g., use of appliances, power strips, electrical outlets, electrical cords, surge protectors, removable power taps). Look for overloaded circuits, daisy chains, wet/damp areas, and damaged cords.

Give electrical safety training to office employees. Emphasize the importance of using appliances and electrical devices in accordance with manufacturer specifications. Educate employees on the proper use of surge protectors and power strips, and the use and positioning of extension cords.

If fire extinguishers are provided in your office spaces, train employees on the general principles of fire extinguisher user, and the hazards involved with incipient-stage fires.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smcx.org/>.