

Safety Meeting Presentations: Computer Safety

COMPUTER SAFETY

Introduction

When most people think of workplace safety, they think of machine accidents, slips and falls, electrical problems, fires and similar mishaps. Today, we're here to talk about a different kind of hazard. I'd like to discuss how to work safely with your computer.

You may be thinking this isn't very big deal. If you are, think again, Did you know, for example, that back in 1976, there were only about 675,000 video display terminals used by businesses? Current estimates show over 50 million are being used. And with VDT's so prevalent in the workplace, so, too, are VDT-related hazards.

The most common types of injuries result not from the computers themselves, but how they are set up and used. Computer injuries are most often ergonomic injuries.

What is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics is a term we're seeing more and more frequently. In basic language, ergonomics is the study of fitting the job to the worker rather than the worker to the job. For example, in relation to computer use, our goal is to adjust the workstation so that it causes as little strain as possible.

Applying Ergonomics To The Workstation

The usual computer setup consists of a display screen, a keyboard and a central processing unit. Safety concerns center around eyestrain and cumulative trauma disorders such as carpal tunnel syndrome.. Many computer operators also complain of pain in the neck and back, headaches, general tension, dizziness and, occasionally, nausea.

Let's take a look at some things each of you can do to avoid these types of problems.

Eyestrain: Most computer-related eyestrain is caused by improper lighting. While you may not be able to do much about the overhead lighting, you can take these steps:

- Position yourself and your computer to eliminate or at least minimize glare on your screen
- Never shine a lamp directly onto the screen
- If you work near a window, adjust the blinds or shades to improve the lighting and cut the glare
- Place the computer at right angles to the window
- Angle the display screen to avoid backlight glare
- Move bright objects away from your terminal
- Adjust the brightness and contrast on the screen

You may still need to give your eyes an occasional break. Simply taking your eyes off the display screen and focusing on a faraway object for a few seconds can work wonders. You can also try some eye exercises, like rolling your eyes, blinking or closing your eye tightly for a few seconds.

Cumulative Trauma Disorders: CTD's are another issue you may have been reading or hearing about lately. They are caused by repetitive motion. One of the most common CTDs among computer operators is carpal tunnel syndrome. Carpal tunnel syndrome can cause tingling, numbness or pain in the hands and wrists. Using a computer also requires sitting for long periods of time. This can cause back problems. Neck fatigue from looking back and forth from the source document to the display screen is also a concern. To improve the ergonomics of your work area:

- Place your document at about the same height as the computer screen and make sure it's close enough to the screen so you don't have to look back and forth
- Adjust your chair so the bottom of your feet reach and rest comfortably on the floor and the back of your knees are slightly higher than the chair's seat.
- Adjust your screen to your height. The screen's top viewing line should be no higher than your eyes and 18 - 24 inches from your face.
- Position your keyboard properly. It should be placed on a lower-than-normal work surface in order to keep the arms in a downward position and not interfere with the blood flow to the hands and fingers.
- Forearms should be parallel to the floor and wrist in line with the forearm
- Organize your workstation so everything you need is within comfortable reach
- Shift positions regularly

Notes

While computer-related health problems are not life and death issues, they can be a real pain in the neck. If you can't seem to get comfortable at your workstation or if you are already experiencing pain or other symptoms, please let me know and we'll work on finding a solution.