

Working Safely in the Office

Most office accidents fall into one of six categories:

- Slipping, tripping, and falling
- Faulty or improperly used equipment
- Collisions or obstructions
- Falling objects
- Fire and electricity
- Horseplay and accidents that do not fit into other categories

The greatest number each year are in the **slips, trips, and falls category**, and the majority of them could have been prevented with a little extra care and effort. For example:

Walking surfaces need to be clean, well-lighted, dry, and free of clutter that could cause a trip. Splintered wood, broken tile, or pitted concrete should be repaired or replaced as soon as possible. Highly polished surfaces should be coated with a slip-resistant finish. Even carpeting can cause problems if it is allowed to deteriorate. Spills need to be cleaned up promptly; stairways must have handrails and antislip treads; and slip-resistant mats need to be placed in building entrances in bad weather.

Telephone lines and other electrical equipment cords are obvious tripping hazards and should be covered by furniture or taped to desks or the floor. Desks, file cabinets, and storage cupboards should be arranged so that their drawers and doors don't open into aisles and walkways—and they should not be left open. Many a fall has been caused, too, by tilting back too far on a chair with wheels—or by using that or any chair as a ladder.

Office machinery can be hazardous if used for other than its intended purpose—or if not properly maintained. If you are ever unsure of how to operate copiers, printers, and so on properly, ask! Most of these need to be grounded. Smaller appliances such as coffeemakers should be unplugged by the last person to leave.

Proper grounding and careful checking for damaged electrical cords (and replacing them promptly) will avoid not only electrical hazards but the risk of fire. Also essential is proper storage of flammable materials—in locked, preferably fireproof cabinets. In case of a fire, you have been instructed of proper escape routes to safety, and we have occasional drills to practice calm but swift evacuation of the building.

Collisions are likely when two-way traffic patterns include blind corners or intersections. It shouldn't be a problem, however, if each of you will watch where you're going, walk to the right, and slow down at intersections. If you're carrying material, make sure you can see over the load. You'll avoid being struck by falling objects if you

remember not to store heavy materials, such as card files, books, and boxes on top of file cabinets. No flower pots, vases, etc., on window sills or ledges, either.

Obviously, horseplay is always a no-no, but there are also some minor hazards around the office that can cause painful if not life-threatening injury: staplers, paper cutters (and paper cuts), and even pens and pencils (store them point down). To protect yourself from back strain when lifting boxes and other materials, remember the correct lifting procedures we have stressed in training sessions.

Always remember, if you should have any injury—from a minor scrape to a fall—notify your supervisor at once and get appropriate first-aid treatment.

