

## Unsafe Offices

How many times have you watched a worker swaying on top of a telephone pole, or straddling a steel beam high above you and said to yourself: "That's the last job I'd want to have. It's just too dangerous!"

Yet, that lineman or construction worker is probably safer on the job than you are in the office. Being aware of the hazards that come with the job, he or she understands the need for safety procedures. This safety awareness is the best defense against accidents, and because of it, fewer accidents occur.

On the other hand, the office worker usually can't see the need for any concern about safety at all. After all, what's so hazardous about rows of desks, phones, and files?

There are plenty of hazards lurking in this supposedly "safe" office setting. In fact, according to one study, office accidents account for close to 5,000 disabling injuries per year in the nation. It is true that office accidents seem less dramatic than those that occur in a manufacturing plant or among construction workers. But they can be just as painful and just as much of a financial setback to the injured worker.

Let's look at some of the causes of office accidents. The most common are slips and falls, and they account for the most disabling injuries. Be careful when you walk on slippery floors or uneven surfaces, especially if you're wearing high-heeled shoes or boots. When you are going up or down stairs, use the handrail.

Even the harmless-looking office chair can cause a serious fall. A chair with casters may roll away from you when you try to sit in it, when you lean back too far, or when you lean forward to pick up something off the floor.

Many slips and falls are the result of sloppy housekeeping. Floors littered with tangled cords, discarded papers, spilled liquids, and small items such as paper clips can effectively trip up the unsuspecting office worker, as can aisles cluttered with wastebaskets and stools.

Office machines also cause their share of accidents. A calculator or typewriter that creeps too near the edge of a table while in use should have rubber feet attached to it—or be bolted in place. Electric machines should always be unplugged when being cleaned, and they shouldn't be used if any sparking or smoking occurs.

Moving something? If it's too heavy, get help! Many office accidents are caused by straining and overexertion. When carrying supplies to and from the stockroom, be sure that the pile is light enough to handle easily and low enough to see over.

Doors are a source of office accidents, too. People may walk into a glass door unless a conspicuous design is centered on the door about 4 1/2 feet from the floor. Solid doors present hazards, too. When two people approach solid doors from opposite sides, one of them can be struck when the door opens.

Desks and file cabinets present special hazards. Drawers should have safety stops to prevent the contents as well as the drawer from tumbling onto the user. Close drawers when you're through with them. It's easy to trip over or smash into an open drawer.

When working with the upper drawers of a file cabinet, be sure to open only one at a time to prevent the cabinet from toppling over on top of you.

Finally, there is always the danger of fire if flammable materials are allowed to accumulate in closets or if cigarettes and matches are tossed into wastebaskets instead of ashtrays.

Look around your office. Those harmless-looking rows of desks, files, and doors can make your job a lot more dangerous than you thought possible. If, like the construction worker, you can develop a safety consciousness, if you can become aware of office hazards and do something about them, the growing list of people suffering from disabling office injuries won't include you.

