

## **OFFICE PRACTICE (DES 1103)**

**LECTURE :** 2

**TOPIC :** Office Safety

**AIM :** To understand the importance of health and safety in the office.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

After completing this chapter you should be able to understand:

1. What are the duties of an employer and employee with regards to health and safety in the office
2. Why accidents happen
3. The aim of the Health and Safety at Work Acts 1974

### **TOPIC OUTLINE**

- 2.1 Why do accidents happen
- 2.2 The aim of the Health and Safety at Work Act
- 2.3 Duties of the employer
- 2.4 Duties of the employee
- 2.5 Safety representatives and committees
- 2.6 Safety and accident prevention in the office
- 2.7 Workplace (Health and Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- 2.8 The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 for VDU operators.

### **NOTES**

#### **Office Safety**

The responsibility of health and safety in the office does not entirely lie on your employer or the manager who represents the employer but also in yourself. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states that you as an individual employee must take reasonable care of your own health and safety at work and people who work with you. You must cooperate with safety regulations and must not misuse or interfere with the provisions made for your safety. There are also the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 for employers, Fire Precautions Act 1971 which governs fire safety in all places of work and The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 for VDU operators.

## **2.1 Why do accidents happen?**

Accidents arise from different combinations of circumstances and events as follows:

- Carelessness
- Thoughtlessness
- Untidiness
- Negligence
- Rushing
- Failure to observe and follow instructions
- Lack of supervision
- Lack of training
- Faulty or poorly maintained equipment
- Fatigue
- Emotional and mental disturbances
- Excessive noise
- Distractions
- The influence of drugs and alcohol
- Adverse conditions of some kind, example cold, darkness, ice
- Acts of God

## **2.2 The Aim of the Health and Safety at Work Act is to:**

- Secure the health, safety and welfare of the persons at work
- Protect persons other persons at work against risks to health or safety arising out of or in connection with the activities of persons at work.
- Control the keeping and use of explosive or highly flammable or otherwise dangerous substances and generally preventing the unlawful acquisition, possession and use of such substances.
- Control the emission into the atmosphere of offensive substances from premises.

## **2.3 Duties of the Employer**

The employer must provide his employees with:

- Safe place of work with a means of safe access and exit
- Safe equipment including efficient maintenance
- Safe systems of work
- Safe working environment and adequate facilities and arrangements for their welfare.
- Safe methods for handling and storing and transporting goods.
- Consultations with a view to making and maintaining effective arrangements for promoting health and safety.
- Where appropriate, a written statement on health and safety and the means of carrying out that policy.
- It is also the employer's duty to protect persons not in his employment, example the public, customers, visiting workers, deliveryman etc. when they are visiting his premises.

## **2.4 Duties of the employees:**

It is the duty of every employee while at work to:

- Take reasonable care for the health and safety of him and other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work.
- Cooperate with his employer, supervisor or any other persons to enable them to fulfill their obligations.
- Refrain from misusing or interfering with anything provided for the health and safety of themselves or others.
- Safety precautions extend beyond the office as employees are sometimes required to visit other parts of the organization, such as warehouses, workshops and others.

## **2.5 Safety Representatives and Committees**

In order that employers and employees can co-operate in promoting health and safety at work, regulations have implemented to allow for the appointments of safety representatives and committees. Under the regulations, safety representatives with prescribed functions may be appointed by a recognized independent trade union from among the employees in a workplace.

Safety committees may also be formed, if any two safety representatives submit a written request to the employer to do so. Where employees are not members of recognized independent trade union, guidance note gives advice to employers on the setting of safety committees.

## **2.6 Safety and Accident Prevention in the Office**

- Keep all gangways and corridors clear. An uncluttered well lit and efficiently laid out office with free movement for staff is an essential requirement for health and safety. Personal belongings should not be allowed to clutter gangways and corridors and cause a hazard for passers-by.
- Examine all floors and stairways regularly for possible hazards.
- Avoid leaving boxes, parcels and other items lying around.
- Place warning notices on/near any temporary or permanent hazards.
- Encourage office staff to be tidy at all times.
- Pay attention to work flow and re-arrange furniture to avoid possible collisions.
- Fit prominent warning notices on all clear-glass doors.
- Avoid placing items at height, which are difficult to reach.
- Do not stand on a swivel chair to reach a file or objects placed in high position; when reaching high objects use a secure stepladder.
- Take care in loading filing cabinets. Avoid opening the top drawer of a vertical filing cabinet; otherwise the whole cabinet is liable to topple over. In such circumstances it is advisable to open the bottom drawer before the top drawer as it serves as a support. It is however desirable to load all drawers evenly.
- Check all machines and equipment regularly and maintain a Fault Book.

- If a machine is not functioning properly, do not tamper with electrical parts but call a mechanic.
- Handle equipment as instructed and switch off machines and remove plugs when not in use.
- Avoid having a trailing flex from a socket to a machine, which can be a hazard for the operator and passers-by.
- Check that all dangerous parts of machines are fitted with guards, especially paper cutting machines.
- Ensure that equipment is placed securely on desks and tables.
- If you have to move a heavy machine or other objects, use a trolley: do not attempt to lift very heavy weights. When lifting heavy loads from the floor, there is less strain if you bend your legs and keep your back straight.
- Be aware of the dangers of dangling jewelry and long hair when operating certain machines.
- Have power points checked professionally for safety.
- Store all flammable liquid and other substances in a fireproof cupboard.
- Many of the correcting and cleaning fluids give a flammable vapour. After use the typist should immediately replace stopper of the container.
- Do not smoke in the office, storerooms or wherever there is risk of fire. When in the office make sure that smokers use ashtrays and not waste paper bin or the floor.
- Keep a well-checked and well-stocked first aid box handy.
- Ensure that all fire evacuation procedures and notices are easy to follow and suitable situated.
- Have fire extinguishers checked and serviced regularly.
- Earplugs for audio equipment should be disinfected before use.

## **2.7 The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992**

Under this regulation and related codes of practice the employer must provide:

- Maintenance of Equipment
- Ventilation
- Temperature
- Lighting
- Cleanliness
- Office space
- Seating
- Sanitary Conveniences
- Washing facilities
- Drinking water
- Accommodation for clothing
- Facilities for rest and meals

## **2.8 The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 for VDU operators.**

Potential health problems, which may arise from the operation of VDUs, include:

- Eyestrain caused by glare and reflections from the screen
- Stress caused by boredom and slow computer response time
- Posture fatigue
- Unsatisfactory working environment
  - space
  - ventilation
  - light
  - heat
  - noise
- Screen flicker

**Under the above regulations (1992) employers are required to:**

- Analyse workstations of employees covered by these regulations and assess and reduce risks.
- Ensure workstations meet minimum requirements.
- Plan work so there are breaks or changes of activity.
- On request, arrange eye and eyesight tests, and provide spectacles if special ones are needed.
- Provide health and safety training.
- Provide information for employees on what steps have been taken to comply with the regulations.

## **REFERENCE:**

1. Helen Harding, Secretarial Procedures – Theory and Applications,(2<sup>nd</sup> Edition )
2. John Harrison, Secretarial Duties, (10<sup>th</sup> Edition)

## **TUTORIAL QUESTIONS WEEK 2**

1. The safety record of your company has deteriorated with a resultant increase in absence of office staff.
  - a) The Personnel Manager asks you to draft a memo reminding employees of their responsibilities in respect of safety.
  - b) Describe four actions that can be taken to improve safety in the office; indicating what types of accidents could be prevented.
  - c) Describe five ways of avoiding the problems associated with VDUs.
2. List five hazards that can be found in an office and state the precautions to be taken against these.

