

A USER'S GUIDE TO DSE HEALTH AND SAFETY

INTRODUCTION

The **(Display Screen Equipment) Regulations (N.I.) 1992** have served to heighten the awareness of hazards associated with display screen equipment or visual display units. The Regulations set standards for workstations, analysis of workstations, eyesight testing and other related issues. The Regulations are designed to minimise risk in what is already regarded as a 'low risk' activity.

HEALTH ISSUES

The health problems of importance are those associated with poor workstations, poor work routine and user posture.

(a) **WORK RELATED UPPER LIMB DISORDERS**

A range of conditions of the arm, hand and shoulder areas linked to work activities are now described as work related upper limb disorders. These conditions can involve aches, pains and tingling sensations in the upper back, neck, shoulders or upper limbs. Proper workstation design and use, and training in keyboard techniques, plus avoidance of sustained keyboard use without breaks should prevent their occurrence. Failure to recognise the onset of problems early and to take remedial action can lead to disabling conditions.

(b) **EYE AND EYESIGHT EFFECTS**

Like other visually demanding tasks, DSE work does not cause eye damage but it may make staff with pre-existing vision defects more aware of them. Some staff may experience temporary visual fatigue, leading to a range of symptoms such as impaired visual performance, red or sore eyes and headaches, or the adoption of awkward posture which can cause further discomfort in the limbs. Such uncorrected defects can make work with a display screen more tiring or stressful than would otherwise be the case.

(c) **FATIGUE AND STRESS**

These symptoms can appear when tasks are demanding, difficult through poor work design, when adequate breaks are not taken, when the physical environment is unsatisfactory or when users have little or no control over their work activity. The risks of display screen users developing such symptoms can be minimised by following the principles of careful design, selection and position of display screen equipment and good layout of the workplace.

(d) **OTHER CONCERNS**

Radiation Effects: There is no substantial evidence of either ionising radiation or electro-magnetic fields causing adverse effects associated with DSE use.

Facial Dermatitis: There is no evidence of a direct link between this rare condition and DSE use, although environmental factors may be relevant. If you have any concern, discuss this with your line manager or Occupational Health.

Pregnancy: There is no evidence to demonstrate adverse pregnancy outcome such as miscarriages. Any woman expressing concern on this matter should discuss this with your line manager or Occupational Health.

Epilepsy: A small number of people have photosensitive epilepsy which is triggered by flickering light. Even those rare cases affected by television are not usually affected by DSE screens because of their faster scanning rate. Should the situation arise, discuss this with your line manager or Occupational Health.

MEASURES TO REDUCE RISK

It is important that, as a DSE user you set up your chair, furniture and equipment for your maximum comfort and ease of use in accordance with the 12-point plan. This should apply to each workstation you may work at. You have a key role in preventing the onset of problems by working safely. Your manager will ensure that an assessment is carried out which will enable you to highlight problems, if any.

Daily Work Routines

Sustained DSE work may lead to visual, physical and mental fatigue. The optional way of preventing this is to take moderately frequent short breaks rather than infrequent long breaks. Work activities and schedules should be organised to allow those staff who use DSE for prolonged periods to move away from the screen frequently (e.g. to do some photocopying or filing), or allow for sufficient breaks. Where your work is entirely self paced it is important that you remember to take these breaks.

Early Identification of Work Related Health Problems

Having been informed of the way in which DSE related problems present themselves, it is important that you report any persisting problems to your manager so that your work situation may be investigated and so that you can be referred to the Occupational Health Department .

Remember all the recognised problems are treatable if caught early. If, however, you let them become chronic before reporting them, there is a risk of some degree of permanent disability.

General Safety

- Keep your workstation and space tidy.
- If you are having problems over access, disturbance by passers by or there are fire or cable trip hazards, discuss them with your line manager.
- Keep food and drinks away from your keyboard, screen and other electrical equipment.
- Use your furniture and equipment as you have been shown how.