

GENERAL OFFICE SAFETY**INTRODUCTION**

This procedure applies to Eastern Washington University (EWU) personnel who work in office environments in performance of their job duties. It is the intent of EWU that all office equipment is maintained in working order and safely used.

The Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) Department assists departments on campus with the safe use of office equipment that are used during department operations.

This procedure is supported by information provided in the Fire Evacuation Procedure, Ladder Safety- Fixed and Portable Procedure, Electrical Safety Brochure, Power Cord Safety Brochure and the Back Lifting Safety Brochure. The EH&S form to assist with documentation of office safety is the Service Request Form.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to provide general safety procedures for Eastern Washington University (EWU) office personnel. Any questions or clarifications may be directed to EH&S.

SCOPE

This procedure applies to all EWU employees working in administration and office areas throughout the university and off campus facilities and shall include:

- General Office Safety
- Good Housekeeping Practices
- Slipping, Tripping, & Falling Hazards
- Fragrances
- Cuts and Punctures
- Elevator Safety
- Equipment & Furniture Safety
- Office Ergonomics

Note: Emergency Evacuation is an integral part of office and building safety, and is covered in the EH&S Fire Emergency Evacuation Procedure. All employees are responsible for complete familiarity with evacuation procedures, including always knowing at least two emergency exits from any EWU building in which they may find themselves.

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A large percentage of workplace accidents and injuries occur in the office building, shops or laboratories. Preventive measures are necessary to promote a safe and healthy working environment. Common causes of office accidents include the following:

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- Slipping, tripping, and falling hazards;
- Burning, cutting, and pinching hazards;
- Improper lifting and handling techniques;
- Unobservant and inattentive employees;
- Improper office layout and arrangement;
- Dangerous electrical wiring;
- Exposure to toxic substances;
- Horseplay; or
- Using chairs or other office furniture to serve as a ladder.

Office spaces can have common workplace hazards that can be dangerous when not properly mitigated. Always use common sense when safety may be a concern.

Good Housekeeping Practices

Many office accidents are caused by poor housekeeping practices. Good housekeeping skills in accordance with WAC 296-800-220 are essential for personal safety. EWU employees are responsible for reducing potential hazards and keeping their work areas safe and clutter free. Good housekeeping guidelines include keeping aisles and stairways free from clutter, cleaning spills, minimizing combustibles in the workplace and storage areas and keeping exits free from obstructions. By keeping the office floor free neat and clean, employees can help eliminate most slip, trip, and fall hazards.

In order to minimize the likelihood of office accidents, employees should ensure they consider the following areas:

- General Safety (WAC 51-54)
 - Keep office free of obstacles that could interfere with proper cleaning;
 - Keep office equipment, facilities, and machines in good condition;
 - Maintain clear and unobstructed access to emergency equipment, such as fire extinguishers, pull stations, eyewash units, showers, etc.
- Lighting (WAC 296-800-210)
 - Ensure that office lighting is adequate and available;
 - Turn on lights before entering a dark room or corridor, and report locations of inadequately lighted areas to your supervisor or EH&S.
 - Replace burned out light bulbs and have additional lighting installed, as necessary. Contact the work order desk at 2245 or <http://aim.eastern.ewu.edu:8090/FMAXCustomerRequest/>
- Storage (WAC 51-54, 296-800-22035)
 - Store materials so they do not create a hazard.
 - Do not stack boxes closer than 18" to the ceiling, in order to avoid blocking fire sprinklers.
 - Make sure stored items are limited in height so that they are stable and secure to prevent sliding or collapse.

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- Keep workplace storage areas free from accumulation of materials that could create hazards from tripping, fire, or explosion.
- Secure stored items such as bundles, containers, and bags to prevent them from falling, sliding, or collapsing.
- Store clearly marked boxes in an approved storage space.
- Never store chairs, tables, cabinets, or other furniture in hallways.
- Never store anything in machine rooms housing utility equipment
 - These rooms must be clear of any obstructions that would slow or prevent access by emergency personnel or physical plant employees.

Slipping, Tripping and Falling Hazards (WAC 296-800-22022)

Slips, trips and falls are among the most common injuries that occur in the workplace. These injuries are perhaps some of the most preventable if employees pay attention to their surroundings, follow good house keeping procedures, and do not run or rush. Keep the following in mind in order to avoid the risk of slips, trips, and falls:

- Never walk with an obstructed view.
- Avoid horseplay.
- Secure throw rugs and mats to prevent slipping hazards.
- Report or repair tripping hazards such as defective tiles, boards, or carpet to EH&S immediately.
- Use caution on wet floors, particularly when wearing leather-soled shoes on hard surfaces such as linoleum or tile.
- Clean spills and pick up fallen debris immediately.
 - Even a loose pencil or paper clip could cause a serious falling injury.
- Ensure that electrical cords, phone cords, and other items do not cross walkways or otherwise pose a tripping hazard.
 - If a cord cannot be moved, a new outlet should be installed or the cord should be secured to the floor with cord covering strips.
 - Never tape down cords or run them under carpet.

Fragrances

Products that include fragrances can pose health risks to individuals who are chemically sensitive or who suffer from allergies or asthma. About 4000 chemicals are used to make fragrances, and several hundred can be used in just a single product. The chemicals may include compounds used in industrial settings, such as ethanol, formaldehyde, methanol, acetone, and aliphatic hydrocarbons, including propane, butane, hexane, and limonene.

The longer the duration of a person's exposure to these chemicals is (including the person wearing the scents), the higher the likelihood that they will develop allergies to the scents and similar products. Fragrances may be found in air fresheners, scented candles, flowers and plants, and personal care products such as perfumes and aftershaves. These types of products can be very

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detrimental to those who are chemically sensitive. They can cause reactions ranging from minor to life-threatening including: coughing, headaches, stinging eyes, runny nose, asthma attacks, and allergic reactions, including anaphylactic shock.

Employees should show courtesy to those around them, limiting scents both on their person and in the work environment.

Cuts and Punctures

Cuts and punctures happen when people use everyday office supplies without exercising proper care. Employees should observe the following guidelines to help reduce the chance of cuts and punctures.

- Remove or guard all sharp edges, splinters, or splinters on furniture or equipment.
- Remove or turn down any protruding nails from surfaces or furniture.
- Do not carry pencils behind the ear or between the fingers with the point toward the palm of the hand.
- When sealing envelopes, use a liquid dispenser rather than licking the adhesive.
- Use caution when folding or handling paper in order to avoid paper cuts.
- Use caution when stapling.
 - When using or filling staplers, keep fingers away from the operating parts;
 - Ensure staples are fully closed when fastening papers together; and
 - Use a staple remover to remove staples.
- Use caution when cutting with sharp tools, including
 - kitchen knives;
 - scissors;
 - letter openers;
 - box cutters; and
 - Paper cutters.
 - Ensure the arm of any paper cutter does not fall freely from an elevated position. If it does, it should be removed from service for either:
 - repair, or
 - disposal
- Use caution when handling broken glass and other sharp disposables
 - Picking up broken glass
 - Always wear gloves and use a broom and dust pan.
 - Never use bare hands.
 - Disposal of sharp objects
 - Place sharp disposables such as used blades or broken glass in a rigid container (such as a box) before disposing in a wastebasket.
 - Notify custodial personnel of any potential hazards in waste baskets.

Elevator Safety (WAC 296-96)

All elevators on the EWU Campus are equipped with notification systems for emergency assistance, activated by pushing the red button on the elevator control panel in every cab. The University Police

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Department checks the emergency phone system regularly, and will dispatch a unit to assist when a call button is pressed.

General elevator safety

- Use caution when entering or leaving an elevator car;
 - The car may not be completely level with the floor when the doors open.
- Never attempt to stop elevator doors with your hands or feet.
 - Let the doors close, and wait for the next elevator.
- Never run to catch an elevator.
- Never use an elevator for evacuation during a fire alarm.

Equipment & Furniture Safety

Office Machines and Equipment: Common office machines and equipment, such as photocopiers, adding machines, typewriters, computers, microwave ovens, and coffee makers, may require special safety consideration.

- Never operate any machine without first becoming adequately familiar with the appropriate operating instructions, whether from an operating manual or from a qualified employee.
- Observe the following general guidelines to ensure machine and equipment safety:
 - Secure machines that tend to move during operation.
 - Do not place machines near the edge of a table or desk.
 - Ensure that machines with moving parts are guarded to prevent accidents.
 - Never remove any guards.
 - Unplug defective machines and have them repaired immediately.
 - Do not use any machine that smokes, sparks, shocks or appears defective in any way.
 - Loose clothing or similar items can be seized by moving machinery. Use caution when wearing loose items around machinery with moving parts, including:
 - Loose belts;
 - Jewelry;
 - Long, loose hair;
 - Long, loose sleeves or pants;
 - Scarves; and
 - Ties.
- Guidelines for Specific Machines:
 - Hand-operated Paper Cutters. After each use:
 - Close the blade; and
 - Activate the guard.
 - Photocopiers.
 - When opening for maintenance, repair, or trouble shooting, exercise caution:
 - ✓ Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for troubleshooting.
 - ✓ Some parts may be hot.

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- Paper shredders.
 - Always unplug before conducting maintenance, repair or troubleshooting.

Electrical Safety and Power Cord and Strip Outlet Safety: For specific guidance on electrical safety, consult EH&S Brochures titled “Electrical Safety” and “Power Cord and Strip Outlet Safety.”

Furniture: Other office equipment requiring safety consideration may include furniture, such as file cabinets, shelves, ladders, chairs, and desks.

- File cabinets:
 - Secure weighted file cabinets.
 - Bolt either to the floor or wall.
 - Avoid creating top-heavy cabinets.
 - Ensure that cabinet drawers cannot easily be pulled clear of the cabinet.
 - Avoid toppling by opening only one drawer at a time.
 - If two drawers of a file cabinet are able to be opened at the same time, remove the cabinet from service for repair or replacement.
 - Fill cabinets from the bottom to the top.
 - Unload items from the cabinet from the top first, working downward.
 - Close drawers completely when not in use.
 - Do not place heavy objects on top of cabinets.
 - Close drawers slowly using the handle to avoid pinched fingers.
- Shelves:
 - Secure shelves by bolting them to the floor or wall.
 - Place heavy objects on the bottom shelves.
 - Ensure that there is a space of at least 18 inches between the top shelf items and the ceiling to allow ceiling sprinklers to function properly in the event of a fire.
 - Never climb on shelves (even lower shelves).
 - When climbing, always use an approved ladder or step stool.
- Ladders and Step Stools:
 - General
 - Employees should always use an approved ladder or step stool to reach any item above their extended height.
 - Never use a makeshift device, such as a desktop, file cabinet, or bookshelf as a substitute ladder or stool.
 - Positioning:
 - Never use a ladder or step stool in front of a door unless the door is locked and barricaded.
 - Keep areas around ladders and step stools clean and free from debris.
 - Place ladder feet and step stools firmly and evenly on the ground or floor.
 - Place ladders and step stools on slip-free surfaces even if they have slip-resistant feet.
 - Secure the ladder or step stool if a slip-free surface is not available.

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- Ensure the ladder or step stool is sitting straight and secure before climbing.
 - Never use step ladders that are pitched backwards on an incline;
 - Never use ladders that lean sideways due to surface conditions; and
 - If one foot sits in a low spot, build up the surface with firm material.
- Never try to make a ladder or step stool reach farther by setting it on boxes, barrels, bricks, blocks or other unstable bases.
- Use:
 - Never load a ladder above its intended weight capacity.
 - Never stand on the top of a step ladder; it can become unstable.
 - Read and follow all warning stickers.
 - Never use broken or damaged ladders or step stools.
 - Never try to move a ladder or step stool while anyone is on it.
 - Never overreach from a ladder or step stool, or lean too far to one side.
 - Overreaching is a common cause of falls from ladders and step stools. Two rules of thumb are:
 - Employees should always keep their belt buckles inside the rails of a ladder; and
 - Employees should work only as far as they can reach comfortably and safely before moving the ladder or step stool to a new position.

For additional information on ladders refer to EH&S Ladder Safety –Fixed and Portable Procedure.

- Chairs:
 - Never climb on any office chair.
 - Do not tilt office chairs back such that any chair leg or support leaves the floor, particularly if they are swivel chairs or they have wheels.
 - Take care when sitting in a chair with rollers. Ensure it does not roll away when sitting down.
 - Repair or report any chair damage that could be hazardous.
 - Never roll chairs over electrical cords.
- Desks:
 - Ensure desks are in good condition, free from sharp edges, nails, and other hazards.
 - Ensure desks do not block exits or passageways.
 - Ensure that glass-top desks do not have sharp edges.
 - Keep desk drawers closed when not in use.
 - Report or repair any desk that is damaged. Contact the work order desk at 2245 or <http://aim.eastern.ewu.edu:8090/FMAXCustomerRequest/>

Office Ergonomics

Proper ergonomic positioning and consideration can help to prevent many repetitive-stress injuries that can commonly occur in the office environment. Following are some areas that warrant special consideration:

GENERAL OFFICE SAFETYStrain and Stress

- Preventing Back Strain:
 - When lifting heavy objects, employees should:
 - not lift beyond their strength;
 - keep their backs straight and lift using their legs;
 - never twist while lifting;
 - always request help when needed; and
 - use proper moving equipment.

Refer to EH&S Back Lifting Safety Brochure for more information.

- Preventing Eye Strain
 - Video Display Terminals (VDT)
 - Images
 - VDT images should be clear and well defined.
 - Adjust the screen's brightness, contrast, and display size as required.
 - If a screen flickers or jumps, have it repaired or replaced.
 - Placement
 - The VDT should be placed 20-28 inches away from the user's face.
 - The center of the VDT should be approximately 15 to 25 degrees below the user's line of vision.
 - Document holders
 - Keep documents at approximately the same height and distance from the user as the VDT screen.
 - Lighting
 - Lighting around computer work stations should illuminate the work area without obscuring the VDT or causing glare.
 - Position computer screens, draperies, and pictures to reduce glare during work hours.
 - For example, place the VDT screen at a right angle to the window, so that the window does not reflect in it.

Work Station Arrangement: With the extensive use of computers and other automated desk devices in the workplace, employees must take special care to ensure proper workstation arrangements. Improper workstation arrangement combined with repetitive motion may contribute to visual and musculoskeletal fatigue or even cumulative trauma disorders, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. It is therefore very important to arrange work stations properly and to take frequent breaks.

When working at a desk for long periods, always remember the following:

Body Positioning:

- Always sit up straight.
- Place feet flat on the floor, or on a stable footrest.
- Ensure that lower legs are approximately vertical and that thighs are approximately horizontal.
- Maintain the majority of body weight so that it is resting on the buttocks.

Procedure
Revision : 1

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Origin Date : 4/30/2012
Revision Date : 4/16/2014

- Ensure that wrists stay in a natural position. They should not rest on the edge of the desk.
 - Employees should use wrist supports that allow them to type without bending their wrists.
 - Supports should be made of a padded material.
- Keep knees approximately 4 inches ahead of the front edge of the chair.

Furniture/Equipment Positioning:

- Ensure any chair is adjusted to provide adequate back support.
- Ensure that there is at least 1 inch of clearance between the top of the thighs and the bottom of the table or desk.
- Position computer keyboards in an accessible and comfortable area, such that the angle between the forearm and upper arm is between 80 and 100 degrees.

Telephone Use:

- Neck tension is a common problem caused by holding the telephone between the head and neck.
- Use a headset or speaker phone if the telephone will be used for extended periods of time.

Please note that EH&S is available to conduct ergonomic assessments for any employee's work station. Please fill out the EH&S Service Request Form, have your supervisor sign and submit it to EH&S.

Associated Documents

Fire Evacuation Procedure
Ladder Safety- Fixed and Portable Procedure

Associated Brochures

Electrical Safety Brochure
Power Cord Safety Brochure
Back Lifting Safety Brochure

Associated Forms

Service Request Form

REVISION HISTORY		
Rev	Affected Page	Change Descriptions
0	All	Release 3/15/2010
1	All	Reformat, remove links 4/16/2014