

Office Safety

University of Tennessee Safety Guide GS-001

Document Contact: EHS-General Safety

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Purpose

All work performed in University of Tennessee offices and administrative areas will be conducted using safe work practices. Office and administrative areas will be maintained free of recognized hazards.

Scope and Applicability

This guidance applies to all UT employees, and students who occupy or work in office spaces.

Guidance

General Safety:

1. Practice good housekeeping. Keep floors free of items that might cause tripping. Keep waste cans out of the way and do not overfill them.
2. Prevent slipping accidents by cleaning up spills immediately.
3. Do not participate in horseplay.
4. Keep tacks and other sharp objects in closed containers.
5. Use the proper tool for the job at hand (e.g., a staple remover to remove staples).
6. Comply with all smoking regulations. All buildings on campus are smoke-free.
7. Be sure to use proper lifting techniques. Make arrangements with personnel skilled in moving to relocate furniture and other heavy objects.
8. Jewelry, long hair, and clothing must be kept clear of the moving parts of all office machines.
9. Report any observed pest control problems to Facilities Services. Never attempt to apply any pest control chemical yourself.
10. Contact Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) regarding indoor air quality or see safety policy HM 35 Investigation of Indoor Air Quality Concerns.
11. Avoid picking up broken glass with bare hands. Use a broom and dustpan.

Fire Safety and Electrical:

1. Know where fire extinguishers are located in your work area and how to use them. For training needs, contact EHS.
2. Power switches must be off and the cord unplugged when electrical equipment, such as a typewriter, is

being cleaned or serviced.

3. Do not overload electrical outlets. Do not plug a multiple outlet strip—an extension cord with multiple electrical receptacles—into a second multiple outlet strip.
4. Report immediately, any damaged electrical cords, broken switches, loose connections, or bare wires to Facilities Services.
5. Office doors shall be free of obstructions at all times to permit egress in case of an emergency.
6. If it is necessary to run a cable or electrical cord across the floor, a cable cover must be used to protect the wiring and prevent tripping.
7. Be familiar with emergency procedures for the office include fire/evacuation, bomb threat, tornado etc. EHS is available to assist departments with develop site-specific plans, providing training, conduct exercises and emergency exercise evaluation.
8. Highly combustible decorations (e.g. corn stalks) must not be placed in a stairway or common hallway. These decorations should be limited to buildings that have a fire suppression system.
9. Dispose of shipping and packing materials, and other combustibles. Loose debris can cause falls and is a fire hazard.
10. Candles and other open flame devices are not permitted in offices.
11. Store chemicals and flammables. Carefully label and seal them in approved containers. Hazard Communication (HAZCOM) training must be provided for those handling hazardous materials.

Equipment, Facilities and Furnishings:

1. Space heaters are prohibited unless approved for use by Facilities Services.
2. Portable fans are permitted with limitations in accordance with EHS safety policy GS 55 (Portable Fans)
3. Book cases or file cabinets taller than 72 inches should be secured or anchored, to the wall. Keep bookcase doors closed when not in use.
4. Avoid overloading the top drawers of filing cabinets to avoid the possible tipping of the cabinet when the drawers are opened.
5. Open one drawer of the file cabinet at a time to prevent tipping. File cabinets should be placed where their use will not interfere with office traffic patterns.
6. Keep file and desk drawers closed when not in use.
7. Guard the sharp edges of furniture to prevent personal injury. Keep desk “pull-out” writing surfaces closed when not in use.
8. Unplug any office machine that smokes, sparks, delivers an electrical shock, appears unsafe or otherwise malfunctioning. Have it inspected by the appropriate repair personnel.
9. Do not cover air vents or obstruct airflow from registers. Do not place furniture, equipment, or

materials in locations that will interfere with air movement around thermostats.

12. Practice proper ergonomics. Note that an ergonomics evaluation and training are available from EHS upon request.
13. Use care with cutting tools, such as utility knives and other cutting instruments. Guards should be installed on paper cutters during use.

Fall Prevention:

1. Do not lean too far back in chairs, as this may result in over-balancing and a fall.
2. Use only safety step stools or ladders for climbing. Do not stand on swivel chairs or use them as step stools.
3. Report all defects such as loose tiles, broken steps, or loose handrails immediately to Maintenance.
4. Use a ladder or stepstool. Do not rely on chairs or shelves for support. Use a ladder that is sturdy, with the feet set firmly on the ground.
5. Wipe up wet spots. Ensure floors are dry, and clear of debris, and clean up spills promptly. Even simple items, such as a loose pencil, could cause a serious falling injury.
6. Ensure that office lighting is adequate. Ensure that burned out light bulbs are replaced and have additional lighting installed, as necessary.
7. Secure throw rugs and mats.
8. Ensure that glass doors have some type of marking to keep people from walking through, or into, them.

References

OSHA General Duty Clause (29 CFR 654)

Appendices

Appendix A: Office Safety Inspection Checklist

Disclaimer

The information provided in these guidelines is designed for educational use only and is not a substitute for specific training or experience.

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Appendix A: Office Area Safety Inspection Checklist

Dept.: _____

Building/Rm.: _____

Inspector: _____

Date Inspected: _____

Check the box if the condition is satisfactory; if not describe corrective action and date when complete.

OK	Work Environment Safety Description	Corrective Action Needed	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Employees work areas are adequately illuminated.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Employees are not engaged in ergonomic hazards, e.g. awkward posture, prolonged repetitive motion, contact stress, etc.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Employees work areas are clean, orderly and don't present a hazard		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Employees are not engaged in unsafe acts, e.g. using chairs as stepstools, using multiple extension cords, etc.		
OK	Walking Surfaces	Corrective Action Needed	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aisles correctly established and clear		
<input type="checkbox"/>	No tripping hazards in evidence		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Floors dry - not slippery		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cords not stretched across aisles or under carpets		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Entrance mats available and used in wet weather		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carpet is secure and free of tears, lumps or loose pieces		
OK	Stairways, Aisles, Storage Rooms, Halls, Emergency Exits, Fire Extinguishers	Corrective Action Needed	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adequate lighting in stairways, aisles and storage rooms		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stairways clear - not cluttered		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stair treads in good condition		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Handrails installed and in good condition		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Halls kept clear of equipment and supplies		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emergency exit doors clearly marked and accessible		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fire extinguishers accessible and fully charged		
OK	Bookcases, Shelves, Cabinets	Corrective Action Needed	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bookcases and shelves not overloaded		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Heavy storage shelves secured to wall		
<input type="checkbox"/>	File drawers closed when not in use		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bookcases and cabinets secured against tipping		
OK	Electrical, Chairs, Chemicals, Step Stools, Ladders, Air Movement	Corrective Action Needed	Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrical outlets not overloaded		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Equipment properly grounded (3 pronged plugs)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrical cords and plugs in good condition		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Extension cords not substituted for permanent wiring		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chairs in good mechanical condition (springs/casters)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chemical products properly used, stored and labeled		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Paper cutter equipped with guard/ blade spring		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Safe step stools and ladders properly used when needed		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Paper shredder guarded		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unobstructed air movement and vents		