

DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS



LEGISLATION

- Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- Assess the workstations of 'display screen users' and 'operators'
- Ensure all workstations meet the requirements set out in the Schedule to the Regulations.
- Plan activities of display screen users so that their display screen work is periodically interrupted by breaks or changes of activity.
- Provide eye and eyesight tests to display screen users and corrective appliances where needed.
- Provide training and information to display screen users.

INTRODUCTION

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 place a legal requirement on employers to assess computer workstations and control the risks to health arising out of their use.

The main risks that may arise in work with display screen equipment (DSE) are musculoskeletal disorders such as back pain or upper limb disorders (sometimes known as repetitive strain injury or RSI), visual fatigue, and mental stress.

While the risks to individual users are often low, they can still be significant if good practice is not followed. DSE workers are also so numerous that the amount of ill health associated with such work is significant and tackling it is important.

WHAT IS DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT

DSE includes conventional (cathode ray tube) display screens and other types such as liquid crystal or plasma displays used in flat-panel screens, touch screens and other emerging technologies and includes:

- Desk top computers
- Lap top and hand held computers and personal digital assistants in prolonged use
- Microfiche readers
- CCTV screens

Not included are DSE on transport, DSE intended for public use, calculators, cash registers, window typewriters and similar equipment with small displays.

USERS AND OPERATORS

Users should be identified because the likelihood of experiencing the possible hazards associated with DSE. DSE users, are employees who habitually use display screen equipment as a significant part of their normal work. The Regulations apply to users who work at their employer's workstation, at home or at another employer's workstation. A user must fulfil most or all of the following criteria:

- be dependent on a computer to do the job
- have no discretion on the use of a computer
- need significant training and skills
- use a computer for an hour or more at a time
- use a computer more or less daily
- need rapid input and output of information
- have high levels of attention and concentration

WORKSTATION ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

Management must carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of all workstations operated by employees identified as users within their area of responsibility. All managers or other staff nominated to carry out an assessment must receive appropriate training.

Assessments must only be conducted in the presence of staff who use the equipment. The user must receive appropriate training before being asked to participate in an assessment.

All workstations, even if they are not used by display screen users must comply with the minimum standards for workstations as set out in the Schedule. Carrying out a risk assessment of these workstations can check this.

Workstations used solely by the public are not covered by the regulations but it is good practice to comply with the minimum standards as far as is reasonably practicable.

LAPTOPS

Portable DSE, such as laptop and notebook computers, is subject to the DSE Regulations if it is in prolonged use. Increasing numbers of people are using portable DSE as part of their work. While research suggests that some aspects of using portable DSE are no worse than using full-sized equipment, that is not true of every aspect.

The design of portable DSE can include features (such as smaller keyboards or a lack of keyboard/screen separation) which may make it more difficult to achieve a comfortable working posture. Portable DSE is also used in a wider range of environments, some of which may be poorly suited to DSE work.

Docking stations are a way to avoid many of the ergonomic disadvantages of portables by allowing the use of a full-sized screen and/or keyboard (and mouse or other peripherals).

Good health and safety training is particularly important for people who make any prolonged use of portables (including docking stations or handhelds.) Employers should ensure all such employees receive adequate training.

EMPLOYMENT AGENCY STAFF

Many temporary workers supplied by employment agencies/employment businesses will use DSE sufficiently to become users (employees) or operators (self-employed people) and hence be subject to the DSE Regulations.

Host employers should:

- assess risks to agency workers (whether users or operators) using their workstations
- ensure all workstations in their undertaking comply with minimum requirements
- ensure activities are planned so that agency worker users can have breaks from DSE work
- provide training to agency worker users when their workstation is being modified
- provide information to agency workers (both users and operators) about risks, risk assessment and risk reduction measures
- additionally to users about breaks, and training when their workstation is modified

Employment businesses (agencies) should:

- on request, provide eye tests (and special corrective appliances, if required) to agency worker users who are their employees
- provide health and safety training for such workers
- provide information to such workers about eye tests and training
- check that host employers carry out their duties

REDUCING RISKS

If the assessment highlights an area that gives rise to concern, further evaluation and corrective action may be appropriate. Remedial action is often straightforward, for example:-

Postural problems may be overcome by simple adjustments to the workstation such as repositioning equipment or adjusting the chair. These types of problems can also indicate the need to provide reinforced training (for example on correct hand position, posture, how to adjust equipment). New equipment such as footrests or document holders may be required in some cases.

Visual problems may also be tackled by straightforward means such as repositioning the screen or using blinds to avoid glare, placing the screen at a more comfortable viewing distance or by ensuring that the screen is kept clean. In some cases, new equipment such as window blinds or more localised lighting may be required.

Fatigue and stress may be alleviated by correcting obvious defects in the workstation as indicated above. In addition, as in other kinds of work, good design of the task will be important. Wherever possible the task should provide users with a degree of personal control over the pace and nature of their tasks. Proper provision must be made for training, advice and information, not only on health and safety risks but also on the use of software.

ILL HEALTH AND DISCOMFORT

If a member of staff reports minor health problems and it is possible to solve the problem e.g. by moving equipment or purchasing a new chair or desk, it is the responsibility of the line manager to arrange for this to be carried out. The workstation will then need to be reassessed to ensure that the problems have been rectified.

REST BREAKS

Whenever possible, DSE tasks should be designed to consist of a mix of screen-based and non-screen-based tasks to prevent fatigue and to vary visual and mental demands.

Where the job unavoidably contains spells of intensive DSE work, deliberate breaks, pauses or changes of activity must be introduced.

Where the work involves intensive use of the keyboard, the user should avoid any other activity during breaks from DSE that demands broadly similar use of the arms or hands.

Where the work is visually demanding, the user should ensure any visual activity during breaks from DSE is of a different visual character.

In any event any break, pause or change in activity should allow the user to vary his/her posture.

It is not appropriate to state breaks or changes in activity requirements for all types of work. It is the nature and mix of demands made by the job that determines the length and frequency of any breaks from DSE activity. However the following advice should be followed:

- Breaks, pauses or changes of activity should be taken before the onset of fatigue, not in order to recuperate. The timing is more important than the length.
- Any such change in activity should be included in the working time and not result in a higher pace or intensity of work.
- Short, frequent changes of activities are preferable.

- Where possible the user should be allowed some discretion as to how they carry out their tasks.
- Users should be given adequate information and training on the need for breaks or changes in activity so that they do not forgo these in favour of a shorter working day.
- Continuous keyboarding should not take place for more than 2 hours and preferably for no more than 1 hour, with a break of 5-10 minutes or more.

Short exercise routines should be adopted to maintain circulation and reduce muscle strain / fatigue. These need not be elaborate or even require user leaving their desk.

EYE AND EYESIGHT TESTS

There is no evidence to suggest that work with DSE causes any permanent damage to eyes or eyesight, but it may make users with pre-existing vision defects more aware of them. This (along with poor working conditions) may give some users temporary visual fatigue or headaches.

Uncorrected vision defects can make work at DSE more tiring or stressful than it should be. Therefore, users who request it will be offered a vision-screening test. If the tests indicate that vision is defective the user will be referred for a full sight test. Users may request an eye or eyesight test:-

- before they are about to become DSE users
- at regular intervals thereafter
- when experiencing visual difficulties that may be considered related to their DSE work.

Further information is provided in the Council's Personnel Procedure: Vision Screening for Employees Required to Use DSE.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION FOR STAFF

All users must be provided with appropriate health and safety training, in addition to the training received to do the work itself. The purpose is to increase the users competence to use the workstation equipment safely and reduce the risk to their health. Training should cover six areas:

- the user's role in correct and timely detection and recognition of hazards and risks
- a simple explanation of the causes of risk and the mechanisms by which harm may be brought about
- user initiated actions and procedures which will bring risks under control and to acceptable levels
- arrangements for solving workstation problems
- information on the relevant health and safety regulations and their requirements
- the user's contribution to assessments.

HEALTH & SAFETY - DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT

Category of person working with DSE in employers undertaking	Does employer have to provide information on:					
	Risks from DSE and workstation	Risk assessment and measures to reduce risk	Breaks and activity changes	Eye and eyesight tests	Initial training	Training when workstation is modified
Users (of employers in own undertaking)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Users (of other employers on-site)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Operators (Self-employed)	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No