

## 30. OFFICES AND COMMUNAL AREAS

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**30.2.1 Aim:** To minimise the risk of harm in offices and communal areas.

**30.3.1 Introduction:** Hazards associated with work in offices and occupation of communal areas, such as kitchens, may seem to be of a lower order than for laboratories and plant rooms, but in these too there is some potential for harm. Most accidents in offices and communal areas are avoidable, generally by the application of good housekeeping, but the specific points noted below should be considered in conjunction with the general safety advice mentioned elsewhere in this Manual and the University's Health and Safety Policy.

**30.4.1 A Safe Workplace:** Commonsense and basic good housekeeping influence the maintenance of high standards of health and safety in offices and communal areas, but staff should always be conscious of dangers to themselves and their colleagues.

30.4.2 Offices and communal areas, such as kitchens, should periodically be surveyed by users for safety-related factors. A checklist, available to download from within <https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/online-resources/checklists> may be used for that purpose.

30.4.3 A risk assessment should be carried out by area and service managers for office-based activities within these areas (see Section 8 of this Manual for further information) with the aim of confirming that risks are eliminated, or at least reduced to a level as low as reasonably practicable, and such risks as remain are controlled by best practicable means. Risk assessment templates, suitable for use in the context of the safety of offices and communal areas, may be downloaded from <https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/online-resources/risk-assessments>

30.4.4 Risks that are identified may be reduced to lower levels by, for example, substituting flammable and toxic correction fluids and thinners with water-based alternatives, and gradually replacing older filing cabinets with versions where no more than one drawer can be opened at any one time.

30.4.5 All defects and unsafe conditions (*e.g.* faulty lifts, faulty fire doors, missing fire extinguishers, defective equipment, poor lighting, damaged floor coverings, unsafe electrical appliances and furniture, *etc*) must be reported *at once* by the person discovering the defect to a senior manager so that remedial action can be taken.

30.4.6 Laboratory coats and gloves, theatre scrubs *etc* must not be worn in offices and communal areas.

**30.5.1 Fire:** Every care must be taken to prevent the outbreak of fire. University buildings on the Edinburgh bioQuarter campus have been designated strictly non-smoking premises (see Section 3 of this Manual), so there should be absolutely no risk of lit cigarettes igniting flammable material within the buildings or of waste paper baskets being used as ashtrays. Chemicals that may be required in print rooms *etc.* should never be used in confined spaces without adequate ventilation. Large quantities of waste paper, boxes and other flammable materials, should not be allowed to accumulate, particularly in fire escape routes.

**30.6.1 Electrical Hazards:** All appliances, including personal items brought into the workplace, should be tested for electrical safety before first use in the office, and be subject to a regular schedule of retests thereafter (typically annually). Electrical circuits should never be overloaded by the use of adaptors to serve a number of appliances. Where necessary, independently fused, multi-socket plug boards should be used instead. Plugs must be correctly fused for the power rating of the appliance, and plug cables should be securely fixed using cable clamps, *etc.* Repairs to electrical equipment should on no account be attempted by anyone other than a competent maintenance engineer, nor should service panels be removed from electrical equipment by an unqualified person. Appliances should be switched off and unplugged after use, and at night, unless the equipment concerned is designed to be run continuously and the supply socket is labelled accordingly. The use of open bar radiant fires in any room or area is strictly prohibited. Trailing cables flexes, if truly unavoidable, should be run through cable strips designed to minimise the risk of slip/trip injuries. Those routinely using electrical equipment, including computer workstations, should make regular checks of the integrity of plugs, cables and sockets to ensure that these are undamaged; any faults discovered during visual examination should be immediately reported and work with the faulty equipment suspended until repair has been completed and certified by a competent electrician. Weekly fire alarm tests may be a useful prompt for visual checks to be made of the integrity and safety of electrical appliances in use at that time.

**30.7.1 Physical Hazards:** Some office machinery and equipment may present a potential hazard to users. Guards on guillotines, copiers, printing and other powered machinery, such as paper shredders, must be kept in place *at all times* when the equipment is in use. Great care should be taken to prevent long hair, neckties and loose clothing becoming entangled in the moving parts of machinery. Care should also be taken to prevent trailing wires, cables, *etc* from presenting a tripping hazard. Kettles must never be placed on the floor or in precarious positions on shelves or desks where people might be scalded by the contents.

30.7.2 Materials should not be stacked on the floor where people might fall over it, or it might become an obstruction to prompt exit in an emergency. Filing cabinets should be so positioned as to avoid people coming into contact with sharp edges, corners, *etc.* Drawers of cabinets should be loaded to prevent toppling when an upper drawer is opened, with the heaviest items being stored in the lowest drawers, and drawers should be closed immediately after use to minimise the risk of a co-workers walking into or tripping over them.

30.7.3 If the cabinet is of the older type, where more than one drawer can be opened at any one time, the cabinet must be clearly labelled to warn users of the potential that the cabinet may fall over if it becomes unstable.

30.7.4 Care should be exercised when using doors which do not have a viewing panel, particularly if heavy objects, hot liquids *etc.*, are being carried. Solid doors should be approached from the side, away from the hinged side, and people should never barge through doors or run in corridor areas.

**30.8.1 Manual Handling:** Care must be taken when lifting and carrying, not to attempt too heavy a load, and not to carry a load which obscures forward vision. Tables and chairs, especially revolving chairs, should never be used to gain access to high shelving, and shelves should not be overloaded, especially above head height. If access above head height is required, a proper set of steps or a stable stepping stool (*e.g.* a “Dalek”) should be used. Further information on health and safety aspects of manual handling is contained in Section 16 of this Manual, which also includes details of an on-line risk assessment and relevant training opportunities.

**30.9.1 Display Screen Equipment Safety:** Work with display screen equipment, such as computer workstations, is not generally high risk, but can lead to muscular problems, eye fatigue or stress if it is undertaken without due regard to correct operator posture, workstation set-up *etc.* Problems of this kind can be overcome by good design of equipment, furniture and control of the working environment and the pattern of tasks performed. Further information on health and safety aspects of display screen equipment is contained in Section 17 of this Manual, which also includes details of an on-line risk assessment and relevant training opportunities.

**30.10.1 Disposal of Confidential Waste:** Collection and uplift of bags of confidential waste may be requested by University staff members. An order should be raised *via* eIT, specifying the number and location of bags (building, floor and room number) and a contact name and telephone number for the responsible person.

30.10.2 Once an eIT number has been issued in respect of the order, an email should be sent to [waste@ed.ac.uk](mailto:waste@ed.ac.uk) providing any additional extra details and information that might be useful to the uplifting contractors (together with the relevant eIT number).

30.10.3 For those who are not registered to use the eIT system, requests may be made by emailing [waste@ed.ac.uk](mailto:waste@ed.ac.uk), specifying the location and number of bags to be uplifted (as above). A purchase order number will then be issued, which should be quoted on invoices relating to the disposal.

30.10.4 Empty sacks for disposal of confidential may also be ordered by emailing [waste@ed.ac.uk](mailto:waste@ed.ac.uk).

**30.11.1 Training:** A self-taught, self-paced, electronic training package related to office safety is available within:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/staff-and-current-students/cmvm-health-and-safety/edinburgh-bioquarter/training-presentations>

30.11.2 A self-taught, self-paced, electronic training package related to safety in kitchens is available within the same web location.

**30.12.1 Further information:** Detailed information on health and safety aspects of office operations and occupation of communal areas appears on the University's Health and Safety web site (and should be consulted):

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/guidance/workplaces-general/office-library-guidance>

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