

University of Alaska Anchorage	Section EHS/RMS
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANUAL</b>	Statement 31
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Page 1 of 7
Title <i>OFFICE SAFETY</i>	Effective Date 05/30/12

*Purpose*

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to office managers and office staff on the elements of safe office work. The office is like any other work environment in that it may present potential health and safety hazards. Most of these, however, may be minimized or eliminated by designing jobs and workplaces properly, and by taking into account differences among tasks and individuals (Ergonomics). Inadequate environmental conditions, such as noise, temperature, lighting, ventilation, and humidity, may cause temporary discomforts. Environmental pollutants such as chemical vapors released from new carpeting and furniture may also induce discomforts.

*Responsibilities*

Management is responsible for:

- Providing training for all office staff in:
  - Office Safety
  - Hazard Communication
  - Ergonomics Awareness
  - Electrical Safety Awareness
  - Back Safety
  - Slips, Trips, and Falls
  - Emergency Action Plan
- Ensuring office equipment is in safe working order
- Providing proper storage for office supplies

Office staff are responsible for:

- Reporting all safety problems immediately to management
- Not attempting to repair any office equipment or systems unless qualified to do the repair
- Maintaining a neat and sanitary office environment

University of Alaska Anchorage	Section EHS/RMS
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANUAL</b>	Statement 31
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Page 2 of 7
Title <i>OFFICE SAFETY</i>	Effective Date 05/30/12

### *Noise*

Noise can be defined very simply as unwanted sound. Whether a sound is classified as noise or not depends mostly on personal preferences. For noise levels in offices, the most common effects are interference with speech communication, annoyance, and distraction from mental activities. Noise in the office can interfere with communications. For example, it may be difficult to talk on the telephone when other people are talking nearby. Speech is likely to interfere with communications especially if the speakers have similar voices.

The annoying effect of noise can decrease performance or increase errors in some task situations. If the task requires a great deal of mental concentration, noise can be detrimental to performance. Also, there is some indication that unexpected or unpredictable noise can have more of an effect than continuous or periodic noise. The annoyance caused by noise also depends on the individual. Some individuals tend to be more tolerant of noise than others. Noise can also be distracting. A sudden noise can interrupt activity temporarily, such as when someone drops a heavy object.

Most of the noise in an office space is not a hazard, though. If there are further questions on what denotes a hazards versus an annoyance, please contact EHS (<http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/EHSRMS/ehspersonnel.cfm>) for more information.

### *Reducing Noise*

Many unexpected noises cannot be controlled, as when someone accidentally drops something. For many of the annoying sounds in the office environment, the following measures are useful for reducing the level of noise or its effects:

- Select the quietest equipment if possible. When there is a choice between two or more products, sound levels should be included as a consideration for purchase and use.
- Provide proper maintenance of equipment, such as lubrication and tightening of loose parts that can cause noise.

University of Alaska Anchorage	Section EHS/RMS
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANUAL</b>	Statement 31
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Page 3 of 7
Title <i>OFFICE SAFETY</i>	Effective Date 05/30/12

- Locate loud equipment in areas where its effects are less detrimental. For example, place impact printers away from areas where people must use the phone.
- Use barriers walls or dividers to isolate noise sources. Use of buffers or acoustically-treated materials can absorb noise that might otherwise travel further. Rubber pads to insulate vibrating equipment can also help to reduce noise.
- Enclose equipment, such as impact printers, with acoustical covers or housings.
- Schedule noisy tasks at times when they will have less of an effect on the other tasks in the office.

### *Electrical Safety*

Electric cords should be examined on a routine basis for fraying and exposed wiring. Particular attention should be paid to connections behind furniture, since files and bookcases may be pushed tightly against electric outlets, severely bending the cord at the plug. Electrical appliances must be designed and used in accordance with UL requirements.

### **Use of Extension Cords**

- Extension cords shall only be used in situations where fixed wiring is not feasible.
- Extension cords shall be kept in good repair, free from defects in their insulation. They will not be kinked, knotted, abraded, or cut.
- Extension cords shall be placed so they do not present a tripping or slipping hazard.
- Extension cords shall not be placed through doorways having doors that can be closed, and thereby damage the cord.
- All extension cords shall be of the grounding type (three conductor).

### *Housekeeping*

Good housekeeping is an important element of accident prevention in offices. Poor housekeeping may lead to fires, injuries to personnel, or unhealthy working conditions. Mishaps caused by dropping heavy cartons and other related office equipment and supplies could also be a source of serious injuries to personnel.

University of Alaska Anchorage	Section EHS/RMS
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANUAL</b>	Statement 31
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Page 4 of 7
Title <i>OFFICE SAFETY</i>	Effective Date 05/30/12

- Passageways in offices should be free and clear of obstructions. Proper layout, spacing, and arrangement of equipment, furniture, and machinery are essential.
- All aisles within the office should be clearly defined and kept free of obstructions.
- Chairs, files, bookcases and desks must be replaced or repaired if they become damaged. Damaged chairs can be especially hazardous.
- Filing cabinet drawers should always be kept closed when not in use. Heavy files should be placed in the bottom file drawers.
- Materials stored within supply rooms must be neatly stacked and readily accessible by adequate aisles. Care should be taken to stack materials so they will not topple over. Under no circumstances will materials be stacked within 18 inches of ceiling fire sprinkler heads.
- Materials shall not be stored so that they project into aisles or passageways in a manner that could cause persons to trip or could hinder emergency evacuation.
- Spills, including liquids and debris, should be cleaned up immediately or cordoned off to prevent someone from slipping, tripping, or falling.

### *Slips and Falls*

Many office and other workers are injured by slips, trips and falls. Often times these can be avoided by paying attention to where we are walking. Often times, employees can be observed reading something while walking down a corridor. That situation is a trip waiting to happen. Good housekeeping can eliminate many slips, trips and falls (see previous section).

During the winter months, employees often slip on ice and snow getting out of their vehicle or simply walking through an icy or snow-packed parking lot or sidewalk. Employees should take their time when traversing wet or slippery terrain. When getting out of a vehicle in wet and slippery conditions, both feet should be firmly planted on the ground before beginning to walk away from the vehicle. During very icy conditions, soft rubber soled foot gear should be worn. Change into your dress shoes when you are out of the inclement weather conditions. In

University of Alaska Anchorage	Section EHS/RMS
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANUAL</b>	Statement 31
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Page 5 of 7
Title <i>OFFICE SAFETY</i>	Effective Date 05/30/12

addition, special strap-on ice cleats can be worn over shoes and boots (contact EHS/RMS at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/EHSRMS/ehspersonnel.cfm> for availability of university purchased ice cleats).

To develop confidence and if your physical condition permits, practice falling on a mattress or a deep snowdrift. Many people break or severely injure their wrists when trying to break a fall. Get used to rolling with the fall rather than trying to break the fall with your hands. The objective is to transfer the vertically falling momentum to a more gentle horizontal roll.

### *Air Quality*

Indoor air quality (IAQ) is an increasingly important issue in the work environment. The study of indoor air quality and pollutant levels within office environments is a complex problem. The complexity of studying and measuring the quality of office environments arises from various factors including:

- Office building floor plans are frequently changing to accommodate increasingly more employees and reorganization.
- Office buildings frequently undergo building renovations such as installation of new carpet, modular office partitions and freestanding offices, and painting.
- Many of the health symptoms appearing are vague and common both to the office and home environment.
- In general, very little data on pollutant levels within office environments is available.
- Guidelines or standards for permissible personal exposure limits to pollutants within office buildings are very limited.
- Adverse socio-political, morale, employee and supervisory interactions can manifest themselves as air quality concerns. Conservative estimates indicate that up to 50% of air quality concerns are attributable to poor morale.

University of Alaska Anchorage	Section EHS/RMS
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANUAL</b>	Statement 31
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Page 6 of 7
Title <i>OFFICE SAFETY</i>	Effective Date 05/30/12

Many times odors are associated with chemical contaminants from inside the office space, or from the building fabric. This is particularly noticeable following building renovation or installation of new carpeting. Outgassing from such things as paints, adhesives, sealants, office furniture, carpeting, and vinyl wall coverings is the source of a variety of irritant compounds. In most cases, these chemical contaminants can be measured at levels above ambient (normal background) but far below any existing occupational evaluation criteria.

Additionally, strong fragrances such as perfume and aftershave can be an irritant to other employees in the work area. It is important to consider the sensitivities of others because each person has a different level of tolerance. Plants may also cause more harm than good with regard to air quality. While they may slightly increase the level of oxygen, they are prone to also increasing the level of mold spores and insects as well; mold spores being especially noteworthy as they can be allergens as well as hazardous to one's health. From the standpoint of allergens, one should not routinely bring their pets to work. While you might be fine with the dander, you don't know the allergies of every other occupant of the building. Exposure should be limited to service pets only.

Sometimes outdoor odors from construction and traffic can become entrained in a building. Local climate conditions, such as, pressure inversions, heavy rain and snow, extremes of temperature, and high levels of airborne dust can cause conditions to become uncomfortable for some people within a building. During pressure inversions, carbon monoxide from traffic can be concentrated at street level causing the carbon monoxide concentrations in buildings to increase.

#### *Evaluations*

For any concerns involving the office environment, please contact EHS/RMS at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/EHSRMS/ehspersonnel.cfm>. EHS/RMS will provide advice and/or conduct the appropriate evaluation to address the concern.

University of Alaska Anchorage	Section EHS/RMS
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANUAL</b>	Statement 31
<b>Policies and Procedures</b>	Page 7 of 7
Title <i>OFFICE SAFETY</i>	Effective Date 05/30/12

*Waste Disposal* Office personnel should carefully handle and properly dispose of hazardous materials, such as broken glass. A waste receptacle containing broken glass or other hazardous material should be labeled to warn maintenance personnel of the potential hazard. Food waste should be contained in trashcans with tight lids to prevent unpleasant odors from wafting into the office and to minimize attracting of rodents and other pests.

*Chemicals* Each office employee must be made aware of all hazardous materials they may contact in their work area. The *Hazard Communication Program* (see [Statement 2, Hazard Communication](#)) includes:

- Written Program
- Material Safety Data Sheets for each hazardous substance used
- Specific safe handling, use and disposal
- Employee Training