



# Safety Scene

## Preventing "Uh-Oh" in the Office, Part 1: Office Safety for Your Component Manufacturing Plant

by Molly E. Butz

While safety in the truss plant is openly discussed, office safety often takes an unfortunate back seat. Remember to emphasize safety in both places.

**W**hen "component manufacturing" and "safety hazard" all appear in the same article, it can be assumed that the general gist will be anything from handling truss plates and hand protection to forklift safety. However, our ever-transforming offices bring with them new technology, automation and all manner of safety hazards that are also critical to address. Attention to safety best practices isn't just for the shop anymore.

Although finding statistics about office injuries is difficult because they tend not to be as severe as those originating in the production area, there are still a number of injuries—like slips, trips and falls—that can and should be prevented to avoid musculoskeletal disorders. This series of office safety articles will give you tips on good housekeeping, hazardous equipment/materials and workstation ergonomics that will whip your office into shape in no time.

### Housekeeping

Phone lines, network cables and electrical cords can pose tripping hazards in aisles and walkways. Keeping all cords up off of the ground and out of traffic paths can eliminate this danger. If a cord cannot be moved, ask to have a new outlet installed or purchase cord covers. (Taping cords to the floor or running them under carpeting are other alternatives to cord covers, but the process used should be checked because a lumpy job can also create hazards.) Boxes, files and other miscellaneous items that tend to mess up desks or get left in stacks on the ground are also hazards. It only takes a few seconds to find these pesky items and put them in their rightful place. And although we certainly wouldn't recommend denying your employees their morning cup of java, be sure that if any of it (or anything else slippery) ends up on the floor, it gets cleaned up immediately. Even slightly wet or snowy shoe prints can send Sally sailing.

If you need something from a drawer or filing cabinet, be sure to close it completely; an open drawer is an invitation for a fall. Even if you think you'll be putting said item back "right away," close the drawer—we all know how easily "right away" turns into three hours. Also, try to ensure that any potential walkway is well lit and that the light switch isn't lurking behind the "Personnel File Blockade of 1997."

General upkeep of the office area is also a good idea. This includes repairing missing or chipped tiles, damaged concrete or carpeting or any other walking surface defect that might cause a slip or trip. Dusting and vacuuming regularly will also help keep your office space looking and feeling neat and tidy. All of these things can lead to a safer workplace and make it easier to concentrate too!

### Hazardous Equipment/Materials

Sharp metal connector plates and high pressure nail guns don't make their way into the office very often, but there are several office related "tools" that can definitely do

plenty of damage. For starters, be sure that all scissors, box cutters and other sharp cutting tools are stored in an appropriate place and have their blades properly protected. And, designate a suitable place to dispose of the blades once they become dull; they still pose a threat to skin when their paper-cutting abilities have worn off.

Various machines, desks and other office equipment can have sharp edges, or pieces that jut out into an aisle. Pay good attention when you are walking, and avoid carrying objects that are big enough to obstruct your view. Any sharp furniture or equipment that may cause severe injury should be padded and highlighted with a bright color to make them easy to see.

Non-weighted filing cabinets can easily tip when heavy top drawers are pulled all the way out. Bolting them to the floor or wall can prevent this from happening. Shelving units should also be secured to the floor or wall and all heavy items should be placed on lower shelves to prevent them from tipping over.

The chemicals found in many areas of a component manufacturing plant are most likely absent from the office space, but there are still a variety of materials that you may come in contact with including combustibles, flammables and irritants. From detergents and other cleaners to toner, many office-related materials can be bothersome and should be used with caution. Keeping a pair of rubber gloves around will help protect the hands of the person using these chemicals.

Even some common office machines present special safety concerns. As is the rule with the dangerous saws and presses in the assembly areas of your plant, make sure you are properly trained on any office machine before you use it. Copiers, fax machines and microwaves may seem straightforward, but each one has its own personality and its own set of doors, gears and pinch points you will need to approach with caution.

### Good Sense

Using good old-fashioned common sense is the best way to be safe in any environment, from work to play. Be aware of your surroundings, no matter how small or large they may be, and always keep safety in mind. An office may not seem like a dangerous place, but hazards can be lurking around any corner, especially if you are in a hurry to get back to your office to take that next call.

If you take just one small step backwards, it's easy to see that using a rolling office chair as a ladder isn't a very good idea; is it worth saving a few precious seconds? Tune in next month for office and workstation ergonomics, and in the meantime, go get that ladder, it's worth the 30 seconds! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email [wtca@woodtruss.com](mailto:wtca@woodtruss.com), or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at [www.wtcatko.com](http://www.wtcatko.com).



### at a glance

- ❑ Phone lines, network cables and electrical cords can pose tripping hazards in aisles and walkways.
- ❑ Like nail guns and metal banding in the truss plant, some office related "tools" also pose a safety hazard.
- ❑ Using good old-fashioned common sense is the best way to be safe in any work environment.



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