Planning for New Technology
The employer's health & safety obligations

This advice sheet offers practical advice on relevant health and safety regulations and what you or an accredited safety rep can do if there are problems with how new technology is introduced or provided at your workplace.

IF THERE IS NO CONSULTATION

Employers are required to consult in good time with accredited trade union safety reps before introducing new technology in the workplace. This right is set out under *clause 4A(1)(e) of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations.* As part of this consultation the following issues should be considered:

1. **Employer's Purchasing Procedures** for computer equipment – to determine who is responsible and timeframes required with consideration of the impact on current workloads and organisation of resource/processes.

2. **Competent persons** – reps should be consulted about who the employer will appoint as the risk assessor. To undertake the task they are required to be a 'competent person' as defined under the Management of Health and Safety at Work regulations (See Regulation 7, ACOP, paragraph 47 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 99)
    This person should have knowledge and understanding of:
    -   The work being assessed
    -   Identification of work hazards/issues
    -   Assess the need for action and provide effective strategies and plans to promote good health, safety and welfare practices
    -   Know their own limitations and when to access expertise

3. **Hazards** – typical hazards and issues arising from use of display screen equipment/ devices to consider include:

    -   **Manual handling** of the equipment – lifting/carrying equipment

    -   **Violence** – when out in the community - risk of staff being targeted if working alone or in the community

    -   **Stress** – for example caused by using/accessibility of equipment/inability to achieve comfortable working posture/lack of training/organisation of work – i.e. adequate breaks

    -   **Design/use of equipment.** Screen too small, no ability to adjust for easy/safe access – increased risk of Musculoskeletal related injuries due to possible excess use, lack of ergonomic design, poor postural practises or eye strain

    -   **Accidents & ill health** – Adequate reporting/investigation/monitoring systems are in place where accidents or ill health arises and meets the requirements of RIDDOR – (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulation). For more information visit https://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/reportable-incidents.htm

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ASSESSING THE RISKS:

The main legal requirements for employers to consider when assessing the risks and impact of new technology include:

- *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations* – sets out the overall principles of risk assessment and the requirements of a 'competent person' to do them. The employer should also consult with their staff when undertaking risk assessments that affects how they work. (Source: Regulation 3, ACOP 15)

- *Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992* –These regulations are to protect the health of computer users, specifically to prevent physical discomfort, which can also include visual fatigue when undertaking computer work. Regular breaks and alternative tasks should be organised to prevent staff working for prolonged periods.

- *Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998* requires the employer to:
  - ✓ Ensure all work equipment (includes electronic devices) is suitable for the purpose for which it is provided
  - ✓ Have regard to the working conditions and to the risks to health and safety where that work equipment is to be used

- *Workplace health, safety and welfare Regulations 1992* – gives guidance on the workplace environment and relevant factors to consider include space, ventilation, lighting, storage etc.

Further advice and access to these health and safety regulations is available on the health & safety Executive website www.hse.gov.uk

YOUR EMPLOYER'S NEW TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Check your employer has such a policy in place. A good policy will clearly state what the employer is doing to comply with relevant health and safety law. It should cover issues such as:

- ✓ Choice of equipment – ensure the need is justified and that the right technology is purchased and is fit for purpose
- ✓ Health and safety information and training for staff
- ✓ Provision of questionnaires for individual users to analyse/assess effectiveness
- ✓ Provision of eye tests and spectacles if needed for screen based work
- ✓ The organisation of work and ability to take regular breaks from work, particularly when using display screen equipment
- ✓ Procedures for reporting problems and access to relevant expertise
- ✓ Procedures for reporting ill health symptoms, with access to Occupational Health (OH) services
- ✓ Making reasonable adjustments (with OH input) when staff are suffering MSK related injuries or stress
- ✓ Procedures for monitoring and to review the technology's effectiveness
- ✓ Appropriate reference to other relevant policies on manual handling, lone-working, violence, stress management.