



# SafetyMatters

Issue 2, January 2009

## Preventing harm

### Are your assessments up to date?

**You might recall** in the first issue of Safety Matters we used this cartoon from the HSE to help dispel the myth that 'risk assessments must always be long and complex'.



Their length should reflect the type of activity you are assessing. A complex research activity will usually result in a longer assessment record than a straight-forward simple task.

The important thing is that an assessment of the risk of harm occurring (to people, equipment or property) is done for existing activities or whenever new work is being planned.

Last October a European Safety Campaign on the theme of Risk Assessment began and the Safety Office are linking in to this to raise awareness and remind people throughout the University of the

need to assess the risk of harm associated with all our activities.

Many areas already have good systems in place to enable risk assessments to be carried out for their work and have ways of recording these. However, a recent short audit by University Safety Co-ordinators suggests that these systems are not always being followed and the risk of someone being harmed is possible.

*If you are responsible for Supervising staff or students:* are you sure all assessments are up to date for your activities? Have the people



"How did it go at the risk assessment course?"

### Happy New Year!

Welcome to the second edition of Safety Matters. In it you will find articles on:

- Preventing harm,
- How to avoid discomfort when working at your PC, and
- another Safety Myth, this time with a seasonal theme!

We hope you find it useful.

you are responsible for been informed how to do their work in a safe way?

### Here is a reminder of the risk assessment process

**1. Identify the hazards** – anything e.g. work materials, equipment, methods or practices with the potential to cause harm. Think about using a less hazardous option at this stage too.

**2. Identify who could be harmed** – consider everyone e.g. the worker, other colleagues, maintenance staff, building attendants, students, public etc.

Think too about how the harm will occur, e.g. a chemical may cause burns to the skin, a person carrying a heavy object may hurt their back, as this will help identify the best way of managing the risk. Don't forget to think about people who may be particularly vulnerable to harm e.g. pregnant, *continued*

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inexperienced, or with particular needs.

**3. Assess the risk of harm occurring** – Ask yourself how likely is it that a person will suffer harm and how severe will it be? Then decide whether the way you do, or plan to do, the work is sufficient to ensure the risk of harm is as low as it reasonably can be. If not, you will need to introduce further steps (control measures) to reduce the risk of harm to an acceptable level. The controls you use should be proportionate to the risk of harm.

**4. Record the significant findings from your assessment.** preferably using the [University Risk Assessment Form](#) or, where necessary, by a more suitable means. Don't forget to tell the findings to those who will carry out or who may be affected by the work.

**5. Review the assessment on a regular basis** – annually will often be sufficient but if the work changes significantly a review of the assessment will be needed. And remember

*review does not necessarily mean Re-Do!*

For most assessments this will not be an onerous task. Finally, don't forget to include the date the review took place!

## Look familiar?!

### Does your workspace look like this?

Good housekeeping plays a big part in reducing accidents in the workplace. Here there is a cable under the chair to trip and fall over and items precariously balanced on the shelves which may fall. The high and awkward storage may tempt users to stand on the chair or desk to reach items, resulting in a fall. Also, the amount of paper stored will increase the fire risk by encouraging its spread throughout the area.



All accidents have the potential to have an adverse effect on your social life as well as your work. So try to maintain a tidy workspace to reduce the risk of harm.

Restricted access and poor posture at the computer can cause aches and pains in your upper limbs, back and neck. You may also suffer from stress and tiredness.

For instructions on how to set up your workstation correctly see: [http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/healthandsafety/CoPs&Guidance/DSE-Guide\\_to\\_setting\\_up\\_workstation.doc](http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/healthandsafety/CoPs&Guidance/DSE-Guide_to_setting_up_workstation.doc)

#### Top tips for PC users

- Ensure your chair is adjusted correctly
- Ensure the top of screen is approximately level with your eyes
- Position the keyboard and mouse correctly
- Keep desk space clear to use keyboard and mouse properly
- Take regular breaks (5-10 min each hour) to do other jobs
- Ensure there is sufficient room under the desk to sit correctly
- Report faults with your PC, chair, lighting etc to your supervisor, local DSE Assessor or School/Area Safety Advisor

## Safety Myths

### Myth: Children are banned from throwing snowballs

#### The reality

At the time of writing there is a light covering of snow on the ground. Some readers might have hoped that the only snow this winter would be that which fell in early December. But for those who actually like the wintry weather they may want to sing along with Bruce Willis in the film Die Hard: 'Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.'

Every year in the media we are likely to hear stories about children who aren't allowed to throw snowballs, and swimmers who can't take their traditional New Year's Day dip in the local lake.



And the reason for not doing it – you've guessed, 'elf and safety'.

What can we learn from this? The HSE advise: if we focus time and energy dealing with very low risks there's a real likelihood we'll fail to deal with the more important ones which could cause real harm. We need to focus on finding ways for things to happen, not reasons to stop them – a sensible approach to managing risk focuses on practical action to tackle risks that cause real harm and suffering.

(Image: HSE)