

*Special Supplement Report for  
helpmychurchgrow.com members*

# **Workplace Health and Safety**

**Enjoying Where You Serve God**

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Whether you volunteer from home or work in a church office, you should be aware of health and safety considerations for your office and/or work space. To do this, you or the church's safety advisor should perform a risk assessment regularly and correct any problems found.

**Risk:** any chance that anyone will suffer harm, great or small, from a hazard.

**Hazard:** anything that may cause harm to anyone.

A risk assessment will identify the hazards in your work area and appropriate actions to eliminate those risks. If you volunteer from your home, it is your responsibility to find those risks and correct them. If you work from the church office, the responsibility belongs to you and the church both.

**Checklist for performing a risk assessment:**

1. Identify the hazards.
2. **Decide who could be harmed from the hazards and in what manner.**
3. Evaluate the risks and take measures to remove or reduce them.
4. **Maintain a record of your results.**
5. Repeat the above steps on a regular schedule.

You are managing an office environment when you volunteer or work as a church secretary. The hazards for you are the same as for other office workers. What follows is a small portion of what you may encounter, or a small portion of what a business office has to consider in running their operations.

Chances are that you're not going to be in a position of handling heavy loads at home, as you would working in the office. But these considerations will still go for you should you be moving your workplace furniture around or order things, like paper, in bulk.

**Handling loads can be dangerous due to:**

- Heavy, bulky materials.
- **Unstable boxes, weight distribution, or awkward sizes.**
- Handling requires pushing or pulling.
- **Repetitive lifting.**
- Area requires you to stoop or twist to handle the materials.

**When handling loads always use safe lifting procedures:**

- Test weight of object by tipping. Make sure the weight is not more than you can handle. Always call a capable friend for help instead of injuring yourself.
- Plant your feet apart, never together, with one foot further back than the other. Make sure you have a good solid floor space to brace yourself upon.
- Always use a firm grip. Find an alternate means of lifting if you cannot grip object properly.
- Bend down at the hips if you must bend. Keep back straight and vertical while lifting. Do not stoop over to lift something up.

- You lift with your large leg muscles, using the foot placed further back to push as you begin to lift.
- No quick, jerky movements.
- No twisting.

If a box is bulky or hard to handle, get help. Sometimes patience is better. Open the box and take out the materials a little at a time instead of trying to handle everything yourself.

Common electrical equipment you may be using are the computer, copier, printer, fax machine, phone, answering machine, radio, and lighting fixtures. For these, and others, you must safeguard the work space from potential hazards.

When checking your electrical equipment over, always be sure that it is turned off, and unplugged.

#### **Electrical Equipment Checklist:**

1. Are the plugs damaged and are they properly maintained?
2. **Is the electrical system proper for the equipment?**
3. Are the outer coverings of cables and wires gripped where they enter the plug or equipment?
4. **Are there any loose parts or screws to the outer coverings of equipment? Any other signs of damage?**
5. Are any of the outer coverings to the wires and cables free from damage?
6. **Are there any visible burn marks or stains that could indicate overheating?**

If you find anything that needs maintenance, get it taken care of right away. Also, take measures to tuck up any trailing wires or cables that present a potential risk to anyone.

#### **Workplace Design**

- Your workstation must be comfortable for you to work at and offer as little stress as possible.
- Is your desk at a comfortable height for you?
- Is the space for your keyboard placed where it's comfortable to work at?
- Is your computer and screen free from dust and dirt?
- Do you have enough space under the desk to comfortably stretch and move around?
- Do you have a comfortable space between the desk work area and your monitor for movement?
- Can your chair be adjusted to the right height for maximum comfort?

#### **Your Monitor**

- Is your monitor placed where the lighting does not cause reflections or glare on the screen?
- Can you view your screen comfortably? If not, it's possible you may need a different pair of glasses or contact lens for this. Check with your eye doctor.

- Is your monitor placed at the right angle to work comfortably without having to move at awkward angles?
- Is your screen clear and readable, without a flicker?
- Are your brightness and contrast controls set properly to prevent eyestrain?

Often, harm experienced by the computer user is blamed on the monitor. Actually, the majority of problems can be attributed to the way the monitors are used, rather than the screens themselves. Proper use, with good workplace and job design, will help avoid most problems associated with using your computer.

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) or sometimes called "upper limb disorders" are common complaints. These can be avoided with proper workplace design and good working practices.

Computer use can cause stress and be blamed for problems. Stress increases when ...

- The system does not work well.
- When the user does not feel in control.
- When the user does not feel competent to operate the system.
- Work pace increases.
- Pressure to meet deadlines looms over the user's head.

There has been no proof that computer work will cause eye damage or disease. Rather, the adverse side effects are due to eye strain and improper work station design or working habits. Prevention of these hazards is easier than ignoring the risks and letting the problem develop in the first place.

Heat generated by computers and other equipment can make the air seem drier and this can affect some contact lens wearers. Changing to spectacles, blinking more often, or using a tear-substitute can relieve symptoms. Also, when the air does seem drier, steps can be taken to replace the humidity. Even for some who do not wear lens or glasses, these steps will make things easier.

One interesting suggestion is to maintain spider plants in the work office. They are said to be very good for the dry air and remove chemical vapours from the air.

Bifocals are sometimes cumbersome to use with VDUs. It's better to avoid having to raise or lower your head repeatedly in order to see. If you use bifocals, you may find some relieve of discomfort by using a different pair of glasses while working at your computer.

Computer usage can cause headaches due to the following reasons:

- The screen has a glare due to poor lighting or wrong placement of computer in relation to the lighting.
- Poor image quality.
- You need a new prescription for your eye glasses or contact lens.
- Stress from the work pace.
- Anxiety about using the computer.

- Reading from the screen for long periods of time without taking breaks.
- Poor posture.
- ...or any combination of the above.

Your work habits are important factors in how much or how little problems you experience. No matter if you work in an office or from your home, make sure you develop these good working habits.

Develop a work schedule and stick to it. At the office, you have to develop a system for jobs that come your way. Figure out how to set priorities and adopt an office routine. At home, block out the appropriate amount of time for your at-home work and stick to it. Demand respect, politely, for that time and your family and friends will respect it.

If your work involves sedentary work, such as long periods of computer or desk work, be sure to take frequent breaks. You must stretch and change position every so often to avoid discomfort and other problems mentioned in this report. Avoid eyestrain by taking breaks from the monitor screen.

Have appropriate break accommodations close by. You need to keep your body hydrated while working, and take restroom breaks when the need arises instead of allowing yourself to be uncomfortable. Keep healthy snacks and drinks stocked so you don't deplete your body of needed nutrients.

Make sure you allow time for mobility before or after work, or on your lunch hour. Even when you take precautions, your body can stiffen up and experience pain. Take time out for an exercise routine, appropriate for your situation. This can vary from visiting the fitness center, to taking karate lessons, dancing lessons, to a leisurely walk, or working in the yard. Just be mobile.

Remember the best way to do God's work is to take care of the body he gave you to do that work with.

## **In closing...**

If you know of someone who could use this information, please pass it along. All I ask is that you leave the entire report intact, as is, and give me credit for it.

For those of you reading this report and who are not signed up for my weekly newsletter, "The Successful Church Secretary News", please visit my website at <http://www.digitalchurchsecretary.com/successfulchurchsecretary.html> and sign up for it. The newsletter is delivered to your door on a weekly basis, and delivers helpful information and resources for church secretaries and church volunteers alike.

Also, feel free to visit my site The Digital Church Secretary at <http://www.digitalchurchsecretary.com>

At the rate of one or two per month, I'll be producing office guides for church secretaries and church volunteers. These guides are priced so that small to mid-sized churches can afford them, and each purchaser is entitled to the updates to the guides for free.

Read, visit me on the internet, and enjoy. Feel free to send me comments, needs, or requests to [digitalchurchsecretary@gmail.com](mailto:digitalchurchsecretary@gmail.com)

And thank you, for helping spread the Word of God and bring more people to Jesus.

***God Bless,***

*Diana Cacy Hawkins*

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