

Office safety and environmental guide

A number of statutes exist regarding the workplace environment but the key legislation is the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

A workplace is defined as any place that is used for undertaking work activities and includes staircases, corridors and walkways including external routes as well as the normal office environment. This effectively means all locations under our control.

For 'common areas' of multi tenanted buildings this responsibility remains with the person in control of the premises, e.g. managing agent, landlord etc.

Requirements

a. Maintenance of Workplace, of Equipment, Devices and Systems (Reg. 5)

These shall be subject to regular checks to ensure the equipment remains in a safe and effective condition. This responsibility may be applied to both Dalkia and the 'responsible person' depending on who owns the equipment etc. In practice, this section calls for an effective planned preventive maintenance programme and adequate reactive programme.

b. Ventilation (Reg. 6)

Any workplace shall be provided with sufficient quantity of fresh air. Although the regulations do not specify the number of air changes and volumes, the provision of forced ventilation may be an option. Any decision is likely to be based on perception aligned to the measurement of temperature and air flows. Where a forced ventilation system is used to provide fresh air to meet these requirements it shall be fitted with a visible or audible warning of failure.

c. Temperature (Reg. 7)

During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable. There is no minimum temperature laid down in law however good practice identifies that after the first hour at work 16°C/58°F is achieved. Thermometer/s must be provided at appropriate locations at the workplace to enable easy viewing.

It should be noted that there is no prescribed maximum temperature.

d. Lighting (Reg. 8)

Every workplace shall have suitable and sufficient lighting. This shall, so far as is reasonably practicable, be by natural light.

Emergency lighting must be installed in every workplace where sudden loss of artificial lighting would present a serious risk to people.

Note: Where there are specific tasks or particular equipment is in use, the lighting requirement may be specified. For example, for display screen equipment work, lighting category II or III must be used.

e. Cleanliness and Waste (Reg. 9)

Every workplace and the furniture, furnishings and fittings therein must be kept sufficiently clean. This includes all the furniture and equipment including chairs and desks, photocopiers, computers etc. The frequency of cleaning is determined by the individual situations and has to be assessed.

So far as is reasonably practicable waste materials must not be allowed to accumulate except in suitable receptacles.

f. Working space (Reg. 10)

Any work room or office should have sufficient floor area, height and unoccupied space. The space should be sufficient for persons to move freely and work safely. The amount of available space is affected by any furniture and fittings present and should be taken into account when applying the standard of 11m³ being available per person. The calculation must include the ceiling height up to three metres only.

g. Sanitary conveniences (Reg. 20)

For workplaces in use before 31.12.92 there must be at least one sanitary closet for every 25 females and one sanitary closet for every 25 males.

For workplaces in use after 31.12.92 the numbers are determined by assessment. However, the minimum above always applies.

Suitable receptacles should be provided for the safe and hygienic disposal of female sanitary products.

h. Washing facilities (Reg. 21)

Suitable and sufficient washing facilities shall be provided. This will not be considered suitable unless:

- i. they are provided in the immediate vicinity of every sanitary convenience; and
- ii. they are provided in the vicinity of any changing room; and
- iii. they include a supply of hot and cold (or warm) water; and
- iv. they include soap or other suitable means of cleaning; and
- v. they include towels or other suitable means of drying; and
- vi. rooms are sufficiently ventilated and illuminated; and
- vii. they are kept clean and orderly; and
- viii. separate facilities are provided for males and females.

i. Drinking Water (Reg. 22)

An adequate supply of wholesome drinking water shall be provided for all persons at work in the workplace. It shall be clearly marked where necessary for reasons of health and safety; cups or beakers must be provided unless it is from a drinking fountain.

j. Accommodation for clothing (Reg. 23)

Suitable and sufficient accommodation shall be provided for the clothing of any person at work

which is not worn during working hours. For office environments this means coat hooks or lockers.

k. Facilities for rest and to eat meals (Reg. 25)

This has a number of different interpretations within the regulations.

For premises that were first put to use as workplace after 31.12.92 there is a requirement for a rest area or rest room to be provided for the maximum number of people likely to use it. This includes extensions or conversions to workplaces. However this rest area can be the workseats provided the worker is not subject to excessive disturbance (telephone ringing constantly), or when food or drink can become contaminated.

All workplaces, irrespective of when they were first put into use must provide near a sanitary convenience a place for a pregnant woman or a nursing mother to rest. Further guidance on this issue is available (HS(G)122 “new and expectant mothers at work: a guide for employers”).

With regard to MTFM offices, workstations will generally be sufficient to meet these requirements, irrespective of the age of the premises, providing the disturbance is kept to a minimum and there is disciplined use of phones etc.

l. Other regulations

Other Regulations covering subjects such as display screen equipment, noise, hazardous substances, etc. within workplaces, are included within separate MTFM procedures.

Office workplace audits and inspections

- a. All office workplaces occupied by MTFM staff are subject to routine inspections to a predetermined programme. The inspection includes the above and any other relevant legislation. However it is the responsibility of the relevant manager to ensure workplaces are maintained in a condition that meets the above requirements at all times.
- b. An office inspection checklist is attached below.

There is a large amount of environmental legislation in the UK, and some parts apply to office premises. The following items should be taken into account when carrying out an office environmental assessment.

Environment

These include the emissions from boilers (smoke, fumes), the emissions from plant and equipment in terms of noise and nuisance, escape of dust or other particles to the local atmosphere, and any other emissions to atmosphere (note that cooling towers (legionella) are covered under safety legislation).

Very large offices may well require a permit for the boiler plant if the installed capacity exceeds 20MW thermal input. Some offices will have standby generators that will require to be assessed also.

Emissions to water

Most offices will discharge their waste water to the public sewer and this does not require a special consent. If there are special circumstances such as an integral effluent treatment plant or septic tank these will need to be considered and commercial consent obtained.

The most likely source of pollution to ground water is the leaking of oil from storage tanks associated with the heating or generating plant. There is separate legislation for controlling this, and all oil storage installations must comply with the regulations for bunding, alarms, delivery controls etc.

Surface water is normally collected and taken to drain through separate systems, but if there is a large car park or other hard standing an oil interceptor may be fitted and this will require assessment and management. All drainage systems should be identified and marked (foul or surface water).

Contractors who maintain air and water systems and use quantities of chemicals will need to be well supervised and their spills and waste materials properly cleaned up and disposed of.

Emissions to ground

For office accommodation this is usually restricted to the proper management of waste to ensure that nothing leaks or escapes from the waste handling area, and ensuring that there are no leaks from empty drums or containers etc.

Nuisance

This will normally arise because of noise (traffic, deliveries, late working hours), light (overspill to residential areas), or odour (rubbish accumulations, engine exhausts). Measures will need to be taken to control all these and prevent pollution.

Recycling

Every attempt should be made in every office to find and manage all recycling opportunities. Computers for schools, re-using mobile phones, paper and plastic recycling, tin cans and old toner cartridges segregated all help to reduce the waste burden on the UK. A lot of office waste can be re-used or recycled, so a segregation facility in every department and outside will help to achieve this.