

Display Screen Equipment



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Introduction

This section seeks to give practical advice to employers on complying with the Display Screen Equipment Regulations, which form part of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007.

In most workplaces there are employees who spend a significant amount of time at a computer workstation. Such employees may be exposed to risks that could give rise to difficulties such as temporary eye fatigue or soreness in the limbs.

It is important to be aware of what practical steps you can take to address these potential risks. Taking such action can reduce absenteeism rates and enable employees to do their work with greater efficiency as their exposure to symptoms such as fatigue and sore limbs will be reduced or eliminated.

What do I need to do to comply with the Display Screen Equipment Regulations?

As an employer, you are required to examine health and safety at computer workstations that fall under the definition set down in the Regulation with particular reference to eyesight and physical difficulties.

Appropriate steps must be taken to control any risk identified.

Employees covered by the regulations:

- Are entitled to have their computer workstation risk assessed and must be trained in the use of the workstation and be given information about the health and safety factors.
- Must be given periodic breaks or changes of routine, away from the workstation.
- Must be informed by their employer that they are entitled to an appropriate eye and eyesight test.

When are employees covered by this regulation?

The Display Screen Equipment Regulations are applicable:

- If the employee has no choice but to work at a computer workstation.
- If the employee normally uses the computer workstation for continuous periods of more than one hour.
- If the computer workstation is generally used by the employee.

Do I need to conduct a computer workstation risk assessment?

Yes, computer workstations must be assessed to evaluate possible risk that may give rise to visual or physical difficulties.

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How should a computer workstation risk assessment be carried out?

There are four stages in the risk assessment process:

Stage 1: Initial consultation with the employee

As a first step you (or the person who is conducting the risk assessment) should consult with the employee at the workstation in order to collect information on the main tasks completed at the workstation. It is important to provide the employee with an opportunity to comment during the course of the assessment.

Stage 2: Observation of the employee working at the computer workstation

You should observe the employee working at the workstation and should record whether the workstation meets the requirements detailed in the Display Screen Equipment Regulations. These requirements can be incorporated into the risk assessment form as a checklist and you can indicate compliance or non-compliance as appropriate.

Figure 4.1 shows an example of a poor computer workstation set-up.



Figure 4.1

Stage 3: Identify the issues that need to be addressed

You should detail the issues to be addressed on the risk assessment form.

Figure 4.2 provides examples of issues that might need to be addressed.

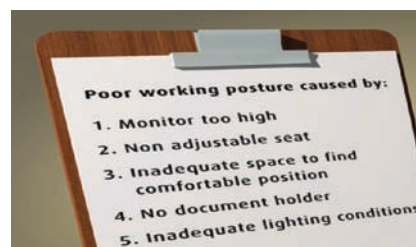


Figure 4.2

An action plan should be prepared stipulating how the issues will be addressed, who will take the necessary action and when the actions will be completed. A copy of the completed risk assessment should be given to the employee for his or her records and for further follow-up where required. It is your responsibility to ensure that the actions are completed.

Stage 4: Review the implementation of the action plan

You will need to revisit the workstation if there were issues to be addressed. You should consult with the employee and observe whether the issues highlighted in the risk assessment have been addressed. When everything is satisfactory, you and the employee should sign off on the risk assessment document.

What does a suitable computer workstation look like?

Figure 4.3 shows a computer workstation that has been assessed and has had improvements put in place,

including adjustment of monitor to the correct height, improved lighting and provision of a document holder, footrest and an adjustable seat.



Figure 4.3

Who should carry out a computer workstation risk assessment?

A competent person must carry out the risk assessment of a computer workstation and the results must be documented. A person is deemed to be competent if he or she possesses sufficient training, experience and knowledge appropriate to conducting a risk assessment of a computer workstation. Depending on the situation, this may be you or somebody else within the business or you may feel the need to seek external expertise. You must be satisfied that the person conducting the risk assessment is capable of doing so properly and effectively.

Is it acceptable to allow employees to assess their own workstation?

No, these regulations require the employer and not the employees to carry out the risk assessment. Employees can be involved in the risk assessment of their own workstations, but it is not sufficient to have employees use a self-appraisal worksheet or a software package to assess

their own workstations. As an employer, you must be actively engaged in completing a physical risk assessment of individual workstations.

Do I need to provide an eye and eyesight test?

You must inform employees that they are entitled to be provided with an appropriate eye and eyesight test, which should be carried out by a competent person. The eyesight test should be carried out by a doctor, an optometrist or a person trained to use a vision-screening machine. The employee has the right to opt for an appropriate eyesight test, which must be made available and paid for by you, the employer. Where eye tests carried out reveal that a particular lens is required for working at a computer workstation, you must bear the costs of minimum requirement frames and lenses. Employees have the right to an eye and eyesight test before taking up work at a computer workstation as well as at regular intervals. Although there is no specified interval set down in legislation, it would seem reasonable that an eye and eyesight test should be made available to employees every three years.

Do the Display Screen Equipment Regulations apply to laptops?

No, under these regulations the keyboard must be tiltable and separate from the screen so as to allow the user to find a comfortable working position that avoids fatigue in the arms or hands. A laptop does not have a separate keyboard and a user should not work at a laptop directly for long periods of time.

What is recommended for laptops?

It is recommended that a laptop should be connected to a separate monitor and keyboard. The workstation can then be assessed to record whether it meets the requirements detailed in the Display Screen Equipment Regulations.

Other temporary laptop workstation set-ups should be assessed to determine the usage of the laptop and to identify potential risks, however, the user should not work off the laptop directly for long periods of time.

Do I have to provide any form of training to employees who work at computer workstations?

You should provide appropriate training before an employee commences work at a computer workstation. Training should include:

- Appropriate induction training so that employees should understand how the work is organised. This could include a written record of the changes made to the workstation and information on rest and posture breaks.
- Instruction on the general principles of ergonomics, the proper adjustment of furniture, screen, keyboard, lighting etc. so as to suit the individual employee's height and reach.
- General instructions on how to adjust brightness and contrast controls on the screen to suit lighting conditions in the room.

How often should employees take a break from working at a computer workstation?

Daily work at computer workstations should be interrupted periodically by breaks or changes in activity to reduce the work at the screen. Although the regulations do not set out the frequency of breaks, it is advisable that a single continuous period of work at a screen should not exceed one hour. The flow of work should be designed to allow natural breaks to occur. It is important to note:

- Rest breaks or changes in the pattern of work, where they are necessary, should be taken before fatigue sets in.
- The employee should not sit in the same position for long periods and should make sure to change posture as often as practicable.
- Short, frequent rest breaks are more satisfactory than longer breaks taken occasionally.

Contacts/References

See Section 16 of this Toolkit for risk assessment templates. See the HSA's website (www.hsa.ie) for copies of:

- Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007.
- Safety Toolkit and Short Guide to General Application Regulations 2007, Small Business Edition.