

Common workplace safety risks



An important part of being safe at work is being able to see the dangers around us and report them as hazards before they hurt anyone. To help you be aware of the possible risk around you, here are four types of common hazards (chemical, physical, biological and ergonomic) and tips to stay safe.

Chemical

This includes inhaling, ingesting or having your skin come into contact with some kind of chemical substance. This could come from cleaning supplies, solvents, gasoline, pesticides etc.

Safety Tips:

- Make sure you are aware of the location of your Safety Data Sheets (SDS).
- Read the labels and SDS for the chemicals you are handling to ensure you understand how to safely use the chemical, what PPE is necessary and what to do in case of an emergency.
- Use chemicals only for their intended purpose. For example, don't ever use solvents to clean your hands or clothing.
- Wash hands carefully before eating, smoking, using the toilet, handling cosmetics or touching contact lenses, even if you were wearing PPE when you were handling the chemicals.
- Do not use any chemical if the label is missing or the cap is damaged.

Physical

This could be slipping or falling, being struck by or against something, being exposed to fire or electrical hazards. It also includes being exposed to temperature extremes or loud noises.

Safety Tips:

- Clean up spills immediately, keep drawers closed when not in use, and keep cords taped down and out of walkways.
- Don't carry a load that is so large it impairs your vision.
- Be trained on how to use fall protection and fall arrest systems required for your work.
- Always maintain three points of contact when climbing a ladder (two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand), and only place a ladder on a solid surface.
- Plug power equipment into wall outlets with power switches in the "off" position.
- Check for frayed, cracked or exposed wiring on equipment cords.
- Don't use extension cords in office areas – limit extension cord use to maintenance personnel.

Biological

This includes being exposed to bloodborne pathogens (BBPs), molds, wastewater, plant or insect poisons, bird or bat droppings, and even bacteria and viruses.

Safety Tips:

- Treat each situation involving blood or other bodily fluids (tissue, saliva, mucus, urine, feces) as high risk and potentially dangerous. They can contain viral or bacterial diseases.
- Wear PPE when responding to situations involving biohazards: gloves, facemasks and face shields, or respirators if needed.
- Know how to properly clean up after situations (like first aid measures) that may involve biohazards.
- Utilize proper disposal methods for items containing BBPs, including labeled biohazard bags or containers. These need to be disposed of as medical waste.
- Exposure to biohazards can also occur during demolition, renovation, sewer work, HVAC work and other types of construction work – be on the look-out!
- Know what's in your first aid kit and what to do if a coworker has an allergic reaction to an insect bite or sting.
- Clean and sanitize high touch areas (breakroom tables, elevator buttons, etc.) frequently during the day or shift.

Ergonomic

This could include working in an awkward posture, repetitive work, forceful exertions or work station design.

Safety Tips:

- Ensure your workstation is adjusted to fit your physical needs – i.e. desk, chairs, monitors, keyboards etc.
- Vary your workday – if possible, try to space out different types of tasks.
- Do not ignore pain. Inform your supervisor immediately if you experience ergonomic discomfort on the job.
- Refrain from carrying items that are too heavy.
- Select tools that are ergonomically designed for comfort.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.
- Maintain a good standard of housekeeping; carry out regular inspections.

Knowing common hazards to watch out for can help protect us all while at work and beyond.