

Health and Safety Bulletin

To sit or not to sit?

Articles in this newsletter:

- To sit or not to sit?
- Health and safety penalties
- Case law update
- Ionising Radiations Regulations 2017

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Sedentary behaviour has been repeatedly associated with many chronic diseases, including cognitive impairment. In fact, the link between illness and sitting first emerged in the 1950s, when researchers found London bus drivers were twice as likely to have heart attacks as their bus conductor colleagues. Researchers are now extrapolating this data and linking it to the fact that many of us have jobs that require us to sit at our desks for a lot of time, and as a result sit-stand desks are being marketed – but are they worth the investment?

How much sitting is too much?

Unsurprisingly there is no clear answer to this question, although a leading panel of experts, who investigated the link between sedentary behaviour and obesity in 2010, suggested that people should take an active break from sitting every 30 minutes. Professor Alan Hedge, of the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University developed Hedge's 3S cycle (shown below), indicates that desk workers need to rotate their activities regularly rather than sit in the morning and stand in the afternoon.

HEDGE'S 3S's IDEAL WORK PATTERN



Desks, at which people can stand are not a new idea. Back in the 15th century Leonard Da Vinci was reported as using one, as well as Thomas Jefferson, Ernest Hemingway and many others.

Improvements in technology means there are now desks that allow you to adjust the height of your desk, to easily alternate between a standing and a sitting position.

What equipment is available?

At the top end of the market, equipment is fitted with electric motors to raise and lower the whole desk. This is an advantage because it means that everything on the desk moves up and down with you, but they can cost over £1000.

Sit-stand adaptors are commonly used by those who want to trial sit-stand options. They are placed on your existing desk, allowing you to quickly raise your work station to a comfortable standing height. These cost approximately £400.

Finally there are suggestions on the internet for what are called IKEA hacks (<https://www.homedit.com/ikea-standing-desk/>), which provide you with instructions on how to create new standing desks or make additions you can make to your existing desks using components bought from IKEA – these are cheaper but you may need some DIY skills!

Does spending money solve the problem?

Unfortunately with most health and safety issues, just spending money does not get to the root of the problem. Workers provided with this new equipment need to be trained how and when to use it, as well as being motivated.

Conclusion

There is a deluge of information about how our sedentary lifestyles are affecting our health and since many of us spend a significant amount of our waking life working, we need to consider how this may contribute. In addition, research published in Psychological Science by Yaniv Mama of Ariel University, in Israel also suggests that although standing takes both more physical and mental effort, those carrying out a mental agility test while standing got better results – this may suggest that standing may also improve our effectiveness at work!

Recently issued health and safety information:

- Stretches for sedentary workers
https://osmondgroup.co.uk/res/Stretching_Excercises.pdf
- 6 yoga exercises for sedentary workers
<https://hbr.org/2015/12/6-yoga-exercises-you-wont-be-embarrassed-to-do-at-your-desk>
- HSE's Workplace Exposure Limit changes consultation
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/consult/condocs/cd283.htm>
- Free stress survey
<http://www.workpositivve.ie/>
- HSE's Health and safety at work Summary statistics for Great Britain 2017
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh1617.pdf>
- ACAS Promoting positive mental health in the workplace
<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/o/7/Promoting-positive-mental-health-in-the-workplace.pdf>

UK Health and safety fines

Fines for 2016/17 were £69.9m compared with £38.8m for the previous financial year – an increase of 80% - reflecting the changes from the new sentencing health and safety guidelines introduced in February 2016.

The fine increase occurred at the same time that the number of prosecutions taken by the HSE reduced by over 17% - from 672 in 2015/16 to 554 in 2016/17. The number of enforcement notices issued over the same period increased by 5%.

Case Law update

This issue focuses on cases which have resulted in significant fines following the introduction of the new sentencing health and safety guidelines in February 2016

Porvi Construcciones y Contratas was fined a total of **£3m** after an employee, using flame cutting equipment, cut through the steelwork supporting a large metal hopper, which fell when it collapsed knocking him from the structure on which he was standing. HSE's investigation found that the hopper was not supported before it was cut from the structure, there was no edge protection for safe working at height and the worker who was killed was not using a harness

Howden Joinery Ltd was fined **£1.2 million** after the death of a visiting HGV driver at one of the company's premises. The driver was delivering kitchen worktops

to a site in Workington when he was crushed to death as a forklift truck (FLT) overturned whilst lifting kitchen worktops from the trailer of the HGV

An employee of an Essex based food manufacturer lost four fingers on his right hand, broke several bones in his left arm and dislocated his wrist while he was using an emery cloth to clean steel shafts on a metal working lathe. He was holding the emery cloth when his gloves became entangled in the lathe. His employer was fined **£300,000** and ordered to pay costs of **£8571.08**

A contractor working for BBC Studioworks Ltd, fell through a lighting grid hatch while recovering electrical cables for during a de-rigging operation. He sustained multiple injuries including a blood clot to the brain, fractured pelvis and ankles, and a ruptured spleen. BBC Studioworks was fined

£200,000 and ordered to pay costs of more than **£6,000**. Due to the brain damage caused, it's unknown if the man will ever work again

Following a number of visits by HSE inspectors to Pride Way Development Limited at sites where they had been appointed as the principal contractor, they were prosecuted and fined **£200,000** and ordered to pay costs of **£1,499.40**. Although there were no accidents, the inspectors identified a number of serious health and safety failings, including unsafe work at height, which mean the company had repeatedly breached health and safety legislation. HSE served four notices for unsafe work at height in the five years prior to the prosecution

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In business since 2000, we employ consultants with at least 15 years practical experience backed up by recognized professional and academic qualifications - ensuring our clients receive first class service.

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