

### Staying safe in the office



Every year, many workers suffer from work-related injuries and illnesses around the world. Tragically, some workers even die as a result of accidents at work. The financial, physical and emotional costs associated with workplace accidents are well recognized by employers, unions and the Government. Cambodia is no different!

To provide Cambodian workers with some level of insurance against workplace accidents, employers are now required to contribute to a National Social Security Fund (NSSF), from which injured workers can seek financial compensation or reimbursement of their medical costs related to workplace accidents.

When it comes to workplace accidents, we tend to think only of garment or construction workers and other people who do dangerous or manual jobs. It is certainly true that many accidents occur in the construction and manufacturing sector due to the hazardous nature of the work. This does not mean, however, that health and safety is a concern only for factory workers or specific industries. Indeed, plenty of people working in offices and shops also suffer injuries and illnesses at work. *All* workers and employers should treat health and safety as a serious issue in their workplace.

Office workers are exposed to a wide range of potential hazards at work. The most common health and safety problems include

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- Back injuries caused by lifting heavy objects (such as boxes or furniture) or bending down to pick up something
  - Breaks and sprains from tripping over wires, falling downstairs and slipping on wet floors
  - Head and neck injuries from things falling down from above (such as boxes and files)
  - Back and neck soreness from sitting at the desk all day
  - Strained eyes from staring at a computer all day. Headaches, blurry vision, or teary eyes can be early signs of showing your eyes are strained.
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- Respiratory problems due to poor ventilation in the office

These types of injuries are fairly obvious when they occur. Somebody gets hurt and then seeks medical attention. In addition, however, people suffer from other work-related ailments that are less visible and often go unnoticed and untreated.

Many people suffer from work-related stress. Long hours, tight deadlines or even conflict with work colleagues can result in high levels of stress and anxiety for some people. This can lead to physical problems including high blood pressure and the risk of stroke or heart attack. It can also cause psychological problems that spill over into the person's family life or lead to drug and alcohol addictions.

Stress related injuries can also be caused from doing the same task repetitively or sitting and standing for long periods of time in the same position. Sore wrists, fingers and hands due to too much typing or data entry is surprisingly common and often not linked back to work place injuries. It is important that you monitor carefully any stresses on your body that may result from your work.

More generally, sitting at a desk all day is not a very healthy way to spend your time. Some office workers suffer from poor general health due to lack of exercise and a poor diet. It can be hard to find the time to exercise regularly and eat healthy meals.

To address work place health issues, there are some simple things that you can do to make your work environment a safe and healthy place to work.

1. *Think before you lift!* Never try to lift something that might be too heavy for you. If you're not

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sure, don't be afraid to ask somebody to help you. When you do lift something, remember to bend from the knees and not from the back.

2. *Be on the lookout for potential hazards*

3. *Maintain a good sitting posture*, with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Ensure that you take a break from sitting regularly during the working day.

For ladies, don't sit with crossed legs the whole day as this can limit the blood flow.

4. *If you are sitting in an office most of the day make sure you take a break regularly*: It is important that you are not stuck to your chair and computer for long hours with no break! Your body needs to stretch and relax..

5. *Take regular breaks from looking at your computer screen* - every 30 minutes, spend 30 seconds looking at something in the distance to stretch your eyes and ensure that they focus.

6. *Manage your time effectively to reduce stress levels*. Ensure you prioritise to make sure you do what is important first.

7. *Be physically active and get a good nights rest*. Going for a run or a swim will do wonders for your fitness and reduce your stress levels.

This will also help you to sleep well at night

8. *Ensure you eat a balanced diet*: Ensure you eat regularly and that you eat well. To maintain your health, stress levels and work-life balance, you must eat a balanced diet. Refrain from drinking a lot of coffee, especially after lunch so that you get a good nights rest. Try to cut back on bad habits or quit them such as smoking or drinking a lot.

9. *Do exercises at your desk*: Twist your wrists, in a sitting position "stand" on your toes to stretch your calf muscles, stretch your eyes in circles, roll your

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head to the left and right to take a break, stand up and touch your toes!

There are many small exercises you can do at your desk, to give your body a break from routine tasks that you do regularly!

Most importantly, don't be afraid to raise your health and safety concerns with your manager or the company's HR Manager. Most office hazards can be dealt with easily and cheaply. It is better to alert your manager to a potential hazard than to "tough it out", suffer an injury and have to take time off work. Maintaining a safe workplace is in everyone's interests.

*This article was written by Sean Power (consultant to HRINC) and Sandra D'Amico (Managing Director of HRINC), Cambodia's leading HR services firm and published in the Phnom Penh Post on March 2009.*

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